"Sir!" She Said

ALEC WAUGH

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WITHDRAWN

"Sir!"
She Said

Books by Alec Waugh

NOVELS

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The Loom of Youth
Kept
Love in These Days
Portrait of a Celibate
Three Score and Ten

TRAVEL

Hot Countries

"Sir!" She Said

By

ALEC WAUGH

FARRAR & RINEHART, Inc.

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"Sir!"
She Said

CHAPTER ONE

A MODERN HOME

"To be a young man these days. What wouldn't I give for that! Think of the time they have. No chaperones; bachelor girls with flats and latchkeys. People say that the modern girl knows how to look after herself. I fancy that's just what she does know, from what my grandsons tell me."

It was a man of seventy that was speaking; a plump, red-faced little man, with eyes that twinkled. He had obviously a great deal more to say upon the subject. But at that moment the tube lift shot out of its dark tunnel into the daylight of South Kensington, and the remainder of his conversation was lost in the shuffling of feet, the clattering of gates, the roar of traffic.

The train of thought was continued, however, by John Terance as he turned to the left towards the quiet of Brompton Square. Such a point of view might be all very well we reflected for a man with sons and grandsons; but it was by no means comforting for one such as himself who had two daughters; the elder of whom was supporting her own

flat on the weekly wage that she received for her activities in Lady Prew Catholic's dressmaking establishment in Brooke Street, while the other in her nineteenth year had successfully presented her claim to a latchkey, an unsupervised correspondence, and a personally selected acquaintance. No, it was by no means comforting.

As he walked slowly westwards in the declining sunlight, John Terance would have served as a typical example of the middle-aged, upper middle-class family man returning to his home at the end of the day's work. He was tallish, slightly stout; he wore a dark, single-breasted coat; a bowler hat; a blue and grey spitalfield silk tie. Under his arm he carried a couple of evening papers. His face was sallow: lined a little; tired but firm mouthed. From one glance you could picture the external conditions of his life: the degree of relative prosperity: the half-yearly grumbles over super-tax: the business lunches: the week-ends of motoring and golf: the bridge: the occasional evenings at his club: the occasional rather formal dinner parties: the bungalow taken every August at some seaside town on the South Coast, with himself joining his family for week-ends: spending a fortnight there in September as a prelude to a bachelor fortnight of golf or motoring with a business friend. A very typical figure, and the thoughts that were fretting him were typical.

What was one to do about one's daughters. Unless you wanted your children to develop into cranks you had to bring them up in more or less the same way that your friends were bringing up theirs. And when the daughters of all your friends were coming back at Heaven knew what hour of the morning from Heaven knew what kind of party with young men whom their parents had never met, you couldn't very well start keeping a check on your daughters' hours and acquaintance. You probably wouldn't get away with it if you were to try. You would only make them desperate and defiant. You just had to sit quiet and trust things to go the way you hoped they would.

"But I'd rather be the father of sons than daughters any day," he reflected as he walked along the left-hand side of the quiet, pleasantly proportioned square.

Against the pavement outside his house a yellow Bentley was drawn beside his wife's blue Buick. On the oak table in the hall were two strange hats. For the last twenty years there had been strange hats upon the table. His wife held constant court.

"Darlingest, I must have my beaux," she had said. "You don't grudge me my beaux, do you? I should feel so old if I didn't have young men around me, and you wouldn't want me to feel that, would you?"

He had laughed and he had nodded his head.

"Whatever I say," he had answered, "you know quite well that you'll get your way about it."

There had been no lack of beaux.

Before the war it had been silk hats that he had returned to find, and in the drawing-room there had been elegant stiff-collared persons and teacups and buttered toast, with Julia and Melanie brought down from the nursery to entertain their mother's guests. To-day the young men had ceased to wear silk hats, nor had they the patience or time for tea parties. They arrived at six instead of half-past four. There were homburgs and bowlers in the hall; olives and salted almonds had taken the place of buttered toast. Instead of tea they sipped cocktails. The cocktails were shaken for them by his daughters.

As Terance climbed the stairs to the first floor drawing-room, Melanie, his younger daughter, came out into the passage. Her grey eyes were bright, and her cheeks flushed. Her hair, a circlet of brown shot-bronze drawn under her neck in a low roll, was ruffled about her ears. At the sight of her father she raised her hands.

"Angel," she cried, "how late you are. And if I stay and gossip I'll be keeping the lad waiting an hour instead of half an hour."

"The lad? What lad?"

"Nobody you know. The lad I'm going out with. Paramount—Arthur Paramount. Rather a pet. But rather dumb. I must rush, darling. I'm hours late.

You'll find Julia in there. Handle her gently, something's rattled her." Waving her hand, she bounded three steps at a time towards her bedroom.

With a smile Terance's eyes followed her. Nineteen; it was incredible that that should be all she was; that so little real experience was at the back of so much apparent sophistication. Nineteen. How different from the girlhoods that his young years remembered. His sister and his sister's friends. Their long frocks; their stiff corsetted figures; their narrow waists; their wide-brimmed straw hats perched forward on their foreheads. Their blushes and their giggles. Their scurryings into corners to confide their secrets to one another. They had thought themselves so dashing, too; so modern and so emancipated with their free-wheel bicycles. You would almost think that Melanie with her short hair, her display of calf and knee, her figure that seemed to be composed of boneless indiarubber, belonged to another sex. "Heaven knows where we shall have got to by the nineteen-fifties," Terance thought as he walked into the L-shaped drawing-room.

At its far and narrow end Julia was lounging in the window-seat. She was wearing a tailor-made costume that ordinarily accentuated her extreme good looks, its close lines emphasising her slender figure, its black tint throwing up the pale yellow of her hair, the pale blue of her eyes, the soft redness of her mouth. But to-day its dark slimness made her

look colourless and insignificant. Her shoulders were a little bowed; there was a dark line beneath her eyes, a dark furrow between them on her forehead; a petulant droop at the corners of her mouth. "Melanie's right," thought Terance. "Something's rattled her. Over-working or over-playing," he decided as he turned towards the fireplace, where a young, fresh-coloured, extremely nice-looking man was seated on a footstool at his wife's feet, talking up at her.

Above them, over the mantelpiece, was the portrait painted twenty-five years back by Sargent that had made the beauty of Faith Terance famous. It was a lovely thing: a head and shoulders; the proud head with its dusky high-banded wave of hair turned sideways, so that it was half in profile that you saw the soft half-parted mouth; the grey abstracted eyes; the cheeks full and olive-tinted. It was one of those pictures that seem to reveal not so much a single mood as an entire nature. You looked at it, and you felt that you had known that woman all your life: that you knew exactly how she would look when she was angry, when she was happy, when she was sad, when she was amused: yet, knowing that, knew at the same time that you would never know her: that she would always be secret and apart; that that would be her power and her fascination. You felt yourself in the presence of a mystery. The picture seemed a direct transcript from

suspended life. Another moment you felt and that proud head would have lifted and turned towards you, those grey eyes levelled on you their abstracted gaze; those soft lifts parted into speech. Felt it just as surely as you knew that the woman in the russet-coloured frock in the high-backed Empire chair would in another moment be answering the eager comments of the boy beside her. The picture might indeed have been a mirrored reflection of that woman. For looking from the picture to his wife Terance could not believe that it was a quarter of a century since that unfaltering brush had limned those flawless features.

As Terance came towards her she lifted her head and smiled.

"John," she said, "you don't know Frank Savile. But you'll remember the Vospers. You'll remember my telling you about them: about their house on Long Island. Mr. Savile has come over with a letter from them."

She spoke in a slow, drawled voice that an American pitch cadenced slightly. "You remember, don't you?" Her husband shook his head.

"I've never begun to be able to keep count of all the friends and relations you've got over there. I find it hard enough to remember the people that I have met, let alone those I haven't. But I hope that isn't going to prevent me seeing quite a lot of Mr. Savile now."

The young American laughed: he was tall, clean-skinned, broad-shouldered; his hair copper-coloured with a glint of gold in it. His laugh that was friendly and boyish was more a grin than anything.

"It's certainly not going to be my fault if you don't. I'm on a vacation here with a whole lot of spare time to be put in. I've been persuading Mrs. Terance and your young daughter to come out with me on Wednesday. You'll join us, won't you?"

Terance shook his head.

"Wednesday's a night on which I shan't be able to leave the telephone five minutes."

"That's too bad. Some other night then?"

"I'll love to."

"Fine. Then we'll have a whale of a time some place."

There was a welcoming openness about his smile.

"A nice fellow that," said Terance when they were alone.

Julia made no reply. The moment that young Savile had left the room she had flung herself limply into an arm-chair.

"You look tired," her father said.

"I am tired. What else would you expect me to be after listening for seven hours to the chatter of maddening women who don't know their own minds? Heavens, but I shall be glad when Ascot and Lords and all the rest of it is over."

She spoke fretfully, irritably as though she had a grievance against life.

Her father refrained from the obvious retort. "It is your own choice," he might have said. "Nobody forced you to work in a dress shop for forty-five hours a week. Nobody wanted you to. It was you who insisted on your freedom; insisted not only on keeping your own hours and having your own friends, but on running your own flat where you could entertain those friends. You never felt free in your parents' house, you said. And when I told you that I was not going to spend an extra two hundred a year on what I considered, and still consider, a perfectly unnecessary extravagance, you said that very well, you would go and earn four pounds a week yourself. Which you have done, and which I respect you for. But there's no sense in your starting to grumble now. You've got a perfectly comfortable home to come back to the moment that you choose." That was the obvious retort. But John Terance had the common sense not to make it. Besides, Julia had changed the subject.

"Where is Melanie?" she asked.

"Changing. She's going out."

"Who with?"

"Somebody she calls the lad."

"That would be Arthur Paramount. He's not too bad. She goes out a good deal, I suppose?"

"Three or four times a week."

"Who with, mostly?"

John Terance laughed.

"If I tried to keep track of my daughters' acquaintances, I should be so busy that I'd have no time left to make the living they're supported by."

"You must have some idea."

"The vaguest. As I said to that very pleasant young American just now, names mean nothing to me till I have a face to attach them to, and that's something I very rarely have. You know how this house is run. There are three tablets by the telephone. The one for me is invariably blank. The ones for your mother and your sister are invariably black. Whenever I answer the telephone, the call is for one or other of them. Usually it's some one who says, 'Oh, well, never mind. I'll ring up later.' At one time I used to try to recognise the voice. But I've given even that up now. There are so many of them."

Julia fidgeted impatiently as her father spoke.

"Oh, I know, I know, but all the same, when it's a girl like Melanie, who's no more than a child, one's surely got to keep some check on her."

At that John Terance's eyes twinkled.

"I seem to remember making some such remark as that myself four years ago. I think I said that though a girl of nineteen might dress like a mature woman and look like one, she was actually only two years out of the nursery. I think that's what I said, but I forget. The arguments that I was met with were put

so forcibly that I was made to feel . . . well, at any rate, I abandoned my position."

He spoke ironically, but affectionately; so affectionately that Julia could not help laughing in her turn.

"I know, Daddy dear, but still . . ."

Before she could contrive an answer, however, the door had been flung open, and Melanie had burst into the room. In the silken softness of a lavender hued period frock she looked like a wild and lovely flower. Dainty, dark-haired, grey-eyed, electric with vitality, she was far more her father's than her mother's child, and was quite obviously her father's favourite. John Terance's face creased into a smile as she came across to him.

"Ah, Melanie, my dear, come here," he said. "I wonder if you could remember and repeat for us some of those arguments we used to hear so much of four years ago about the day having passed when girls were kept behind a show-case in a drawing-room till some man came along to marry them; about the modern girl being as capable as the modern boy of looking after her own welfare; about the modern girl's right to choose her friends; about her right to freedom; to go where she liked, when she liked, with whom she liked. Can you remember, do you think?"

Melanie looked puzzled.

"Darling," she said, "we're not going to start all that over again, are we?"

"I'm not, my dear. But your sister seems to think you oughtn't to go out with men to whom your parents haven't been introduced."

Melanie burst out laughing.

"Dear Julia, so sweet, and so absurd." And running across to her she flung an arm about her sister's neck, kissing her lightly and quickly on the cheek.

"My silly sweet," she said, "because you knew me when I was a baby, you still think of me as an infant in half socks that's got to be protected. Isn't that so, mother?"

Her mother smiled. "I'm not worrying about you, much," she said. And those six words seemed to have ended the discussion.

Melanie laughed happily. "Of course not, nor should any one. And there," she added, "if I'm not mistaken is the lad calling for me in his centipede."

She ran over to the window and looked out. "As I thought," she cried. "There's no one in this world that handles his gears as that child does." She was hurrying across the room as she was speaking. In the doorway she turned round to wave a hand.

"You needn't bother to wait up for me, Julia," she said. "I've got a latchkey."

Faith Terance had taken no part in the discussion. When her opinion had been asked it was her younger

not her elder daughter's side that she had taken. But later when Julia as well as Melanie had gone she looked pensively at her husband.

"It was funny of Julia breaking out like that," she said. "It was unlike her. I wonder why?"

John Terance shrugged his shoulders.

"I've ceased wondering at anything my children do. One's got to let them go their own ways. They don't want anxiety or advice. If they want help they'll ask for it."

His wife was not satisfied, however.

"I daresay," she said, "but when they do something that's out of keeping with their whole attitude —there's a reason for everything, you know."

CHAPTER TWO

A MODERN DAUGHTER

THE centipede that had called for Melanie was a pre-war Daimler: vast, cumbersome, and erratic. The unique manipulator of its gears was by ten years its senior. He was the kind of man that girls find tiresome and married women describe as "sweet." He was tall without being distinguished: robust without being strong: well-featured without being handsome. There was always something wrong with his appearance. His tie would be crooked, or his coat would have rucked behind his shoulders, or the right side of his chin would be half shaved, or his collar soiled from a scratched throat; as a complement to which he had a rather jolly, rather winsome smile that seemed to say, "Yes, I know all that. But I'm doing my best about it, I am really!"

His welcoming of Melanie was an effusion of apologies.

"I'm terribly sorry. I'm terribly late, aren't I?"

"Twenty-seven and a quarter minutes."

"I know. I lost my collar stud. I hadn't a spare one. You can't think how hard it is to get hold of

one at this time of night. I'd hoped you'd be late, too."

"But I wasn't, Arthur. I was punctual. More than punctual. I've been waiting for you," she lied resolutely, "more than half an hour."

An expression of the utmost gloom oppressed his features. "Heavens!" he said. "Really . . . oh, but . . . well . . . now we are here, where are we going to dine?"

"Anywhere you like."

"But you must choose. What would you like, something quiet or something noisy?"

"Noisy, Arthur, naturally."

"The Vienna, then. It's the noisiest place I know." He spoke petulantly.

"He's angry," she thought. "He wanted to go somewhere quiet. Because the food and wine are better there, he'd say. But I don't care about what I eat and drink; not really. I want lights and music. Besides, it isn't really for the food and wine that he wanted to be quiet. He wanted to have me to himself. Which means that he'd start getting maudlin half-way through dinner; and I don't like him when he's maudlin. Not so early in the evening, anyhow." Later on in the evening, she reflected, it was different. At half-past three or so. You'd dined, and had been on to a cabaret; you'd had supper at Ciro's or the Kit Cat. You'd gone on to "The Green Grotto" for eggs and bacon. You were tired and happy and

at peace. Then it was rather nice to lie back quietly against cushions and have your hand held and hear nice things said to you. That was nice. Then, but not before. "Besides," she thought, "it's his own fault. If he'd wanted to go to a quiet place, he should have taken me to one without asking my opinion. The man who asks a woman what she wants deserves all that's coming to him."

With her conscience cleared she chattered rapidly and ceaselessly as the car swung its way past Knightsbridge down the length of Piccadilly. "I'll at least see to it," she decided, "that the lad enjoys himself." About her own enjoyment she had no doubt whatever.

As the glass doors of the Vienna revolved before her, a wave of scented heat, crested with the noise of music and the swell of talk, surged up to meet her. Her heart beat fast with anticipation. It was only eighteen months since she had dined for the first time in a big restaurant, and the excitement of entering one still slightly took her breath away.

She felt like an actress on the eve of a first night as she hurried across the lounge, as she handed her cloak to an attendant, as she stood before the glass patting the dark hair that coiled over her ears to the soft roll below her neck, as she smoothed with her little finger the powdered surface of her cheeks, as she turned slowly and self-admiringly before the full glass mirror.

She was alone in the cloak-room and the attendant smiled encouragingly at her.

"There aren't many women who could risk wearing that," she said.

Melanie smiled back at her. She understood what she meant. It was a young girl's frock: very simple; mauve and period; the bodice cut close, the skirt billowing and hooped. She had only worn it twice before. It would have been madness to have wasted such a frock on a quiet restaurant where no one could have seen it.

As she walked at the lad's side into the restaurant she felt even more like an actress going on to the stage. The air was cool on her bare shoulders. But the blood beat hotly through her veins. Heads were turned in her direction. Eyes followed her lingeringly. What were they saying to themselves, she wondered, as she glanced upwards and sideways at the lad.

Something of her self-confidence evaporated, however, as her eyes met his. The lad was not somehow the kind of man beside whom a woman would choose to walk into a restaurant. It was not that he was a discredit to her, but that he might have been a greater credit. The man she would have liked to have been seen walking beside would have been tall and strong and handsome; some vast blond Dempsey of a man, so that people would have said, "What a magnificent couple. Look there. How rarely you

see a really attractive woman with a man that's worthy of her." Either that or some one elegant, well-produced; in the French sense, *fine*. He need not necessarily have been young, or tall, or handsome. He could have been short and neat-waisted; foreign, possibly, with a little pointed beard, so that people would say, "What a distinguished-looking man that is beside the extremely pretty girl. I wonder who they are? He looks as though he might be a diplomat." That was how she would have liked it to have been. It was impossible to produce a really satisfactory effect when you were with the lad. The sooner she got him safely seated at a table the better.

"We'll go over there," she said.

The moment she was at the table she leant forward across it on her elbows looking about her with quick, eager glances, seeing in a first hurried survey the shape and colour of the room; its pale green pillars edged with gilt; the rose-pink curtains falling behind the curved and cushioned window seats; the black ebony of the oval dancing floor; the swinging kaleidoscope of the hanging lustres; the flowered tables; the steaming ice pails at their sides; the reds and lilacs, the yellows, the pinks, the greens; the brocades and marocains and georgettes of Poiret, Paquin, Paris Trades; the handiwork in black and white of Poole, Hawes and Curtis, Anderson and Sheppard. In one glance she took all that in. Then slowly, deliberately, she looked round the room,

examining each frock, each face in turn, searching for acquaintances, searching for celebrities.

At her side the lad was asking her about cocktails. What would she have? a Bronx, a Martini, a Manhattan? She shook her head. She didn't want a cocktail. This room, these lights, this music were all the intoxicant she needed.

"Look," she said, "isn't that Judy Carmichael over there?"

The lad was not interesting himself, however, in any number of Judy Carmichaels. He was puzzling over a long, heavily embossed menu.

"Now, what shall we start with?" he was saying. "If we have smoked salmon, we shouldn't want any fish after our soup. Would you rather begin with grape fruit? Then we could have a sole colbert, or a truite au bleu."

But Melanie was as uninterested in the menu as was her companion in the Vienna's clientele.

"I don't mind," she said. "I leave it to you. You choose."

"Oh, but I can't," Paramount expostulated. "You must really, surely now . . ."

The waiter shifted from Paramount's side to Melanie's.

"Perhaps, Madam," he said.

Melanie did not care what she ate. She was too excited to notice what she was eating; would be too excited probably to eat anything at all. She took the

menu up, and read off the top dish of every heading; it seemed the easiest way, and it didn't sound too bad. Caviare. Bortsch. Œufs Cocotte. Caneton à la Presse. Pêche Melba. One might do worse.

"And wine," the lad was asking, "what would you like to drink; a dry or a sweet wine?"

Melanie felt thirsty; she was also hot. An ice cream soda was what she would have really liked. But that, she supposed, she could not ask for. So she took the wine list, read down it till she saw a name that attracted her, glanced to see if its price justified her choice, decided that it did, pointed to Chambertin 1916, ordered herself a glass of water, and leaning across the table, returned to her examination of the room. Was it or was it not Judy Carmichael in the green dress by the second pillar?

At her side the lad was trying to embark on a serious discussion.

"I was reading an article in the *Meteor* the other day, about young girls being too much in love with life to be able to fall in love with a person. Do you think there is anything in that? I half think there is."

Melanie nodded her head.

"I expect so," she said. "Do you see that girl over there, dancing with the very tall, fair-haired man? What do you think of the frock she's wearing? It's out of Julia's shop. I nearly bought it. Julia wanted

me to. I wonder if I ought to have. What do you think?"

"You couldn't conceivably look lovelier than you do," said Paramount.

"Caviare, Madam," said the waiter.

Melanie conveyed a century of dead sturgeon to her mouth. Then made a wry grimace. She didn't much care for caviare; any more than she cared for cocktails. If the lad had ordered the dinner himself, it would have cost him less, and would have pleased her more. She pushed the plate forward a little and leant upon her elbow.

Yes, it was a jolly frock. Perhaps she should have bought it. Julia was usually right about clothes; was right about most things, when it came to that; calm-blooded level-headed Julia. Except when she made ridiculous suggestions as she had to-night, about nineteen-year-olds and chaperons. For Julia to talk like that! Julia of all people, when one remembered the way she had talked four years ago. About being able to look after herself; and then all that talk a year later about her flat; how she had maintained that she could not feel really free at home; and that if her father would not give her a flat, she would go and earn the extra four pounds a week that she would need to support it with. For Julia to start talking about chaperons. Dear Julia, so silly and so sweet.

"The article pointed out," the lad was saying,

"that it's not till a person's fallen out of love with life that she can start falling in love with people. That's why, it said, French novelists choose women in the middle thirties for their heroines."

"I think," said Melanie, "that the rather short man with the woman in the gold tissue dress is the best dancer in the room."

"Bortsch, madam," said the waiter.

The soup was palatable, but lukewarm.

"You never get good food anywhere that there's dancing," said the lad.

"Let's dance then," said Melanie.

The lad was comfortable to dance with, but ungainly as a spectacle. Melanie would have preferred him to look well and hold her awkwardly. "Now, whom would I like to be dancing with?" she thought. Not the dapper little man with the woman in the gold tissue dress. He really was too short. He would have made her look cumbersome. She scanned the other dancers for the perfect partner. Scanned, but did not find him. "If I had the right partner," thought Melanie as the lad piloted her back to the congealing, œuf cocotte, "there's not a woman in the room that wouldn't be jealous of me."

"Cleopatra was close on forty," the lad was saying, "when she first met Anthony."

"Let's do it," wailed the saxophone. "Let's do it, let's fall in love."

"Juliet, of course, was only fourteen," the lad con-

tinued, "but then Shakespeare was only a child himself when he wrote the play."

With piercing, agonising intensity, drowning the flow of talk, the clarionette pleaded in unison with the drums.

"Let's do it," Melanie hummed. "Let's do it. Let's fall in love."

Yes, but it wasn't so easy as all that, she thought as she pushed her plate forward to make room for her elbows. It wasn't anything like as easy as all that. She'd love to fall in love. For two years she'd been wanting to. But she'd not been able to. Not in the way, anyhow, that one did in books. She had been fond of people, a whole lot fond of them. Once or twice she had been quite thrilled; for about five minutes. She had enjoyed having her hand held by the young men who drove her home from dances. It had been fun seeing people's faces light with surprise when she came into the room; it had been fun hearing people say, "I'll only go to that party if you do"; she had felt angry when a man whom she fancied to be her particular piece of property had his engagement to her third best friend announced the morning after he had told her that he had cancelled a cricket tour for the sake of a single dance with her. She had experienced a number of secondary emotions.

But as for feeling that the meaning had gone out of existence because she had been rung up at quar-

ter past, instead of quarter to eleven, why, she couldn't even remember when the morning came who'd promised to ring her up and who had not.

"Let's do it. Let's do it. Let's fall in love."

Wooingly the words were sighed to her.

Well, one day she supposed she would. Most folk seemed to, or said they did. But it was with the feeling that life had somehow cheated her that she looked slowly round the room wondering whether it was by the enchantment that she had missed, that the smiles of this and the other couple were made so light; looking slowly from table to table, from group to group, till her glance fell upon a table by the door against the wall at which two men in dinner jackets were seated by themselves. One of the men was looking at her, intently and purposefully, with eyes that were dark and glowing. His glance did not drop as her eyes met it. She looked away. But she was no longer interested in the other tables, the other frocks, the other faces. She was too conscious of the dark eyes that had met her glance. Were they still fixed on her, she wondered? She looked back and saw they were.

"Let's dance," she said.

As they danced, she was conscious of those dark eyes watching her. She piloted the lad towards them. He was forty, she decided, at least forty. He had an interesting face, sallow, fine drawn and lined. The face of a man who has lived life and understands it.

"He must have had love affairs," thought Melanie, "big love affairs, exciting love affairs. What does he think of me, I wonder?" And she felt angry with the lad for not being different, for not being the vast blond Dempsey, or the dapper *fine* ambassador who would have made this experienced worldling feel her to be the kind of woman who could get any man she chose. What use was the lad to her? Any woman could get a boob like that.

"Let's go and sit down," she said.

Back at the table with the complicated machinery of a caneton à la presse in front of her, her self-confidence in part returned. At any rate this stranger would realise that she was being done well by her unimpressive host. Boldly she looked across the room. The dark eyes were still turned upon her. They were looking intently, not smilingly, but with an awareness of mutual recognition. With those eyes still fixed upon her, the man put his hand into his hip pocket, drew out a leather note case; opened it, took out a card, drew from his trouser pocket a gold pencil, and began to write.

"I suppose it really is impossible," the lad was saying, "for a person to fall in love who's thinking half the time of things like clothes and motor cars that aren't connected in the least with love."

Melanie nodded. Yes, she supposed it was. And "I wonder," she thought, "what he's writing and whom he's writing to." It was a funny thing to be

doing in a restaurant. It was funny the way in which he had done it: looking at her like that, and then with his eye still on her taking that card and that pencil from his pocket: almost as though that writing and that look were part of the same process: almost as though it were to her that the note was being written.

Not that it was, of course. It could not be. How could it be. He was sending a message to a friend: to his club perhaps: to book a table or to countermand an order. There were a hundred and one reasons for writing notes. Any one of which was more probable than that he should be writing one to her. Of course he was not writing to her. People did not do that kind of thing. It was the kind of thing that happened in books, but never did in life. In real life people did not write notes to strangers that they had seen across a restaurant. He could not, of course he could not. She could not possibly have made all that effect on him.

But the message, whatever it was, had been written. A waiter had been beckoned, explanations were being given. There was no pointing. Just an inclination of the head and the waiter was coming across the room, threading his way gingerly between the tables towards their table. The dark eyes were looking intently at her.

But it can't be, she thought: it can't. Though even as she thought it, she knew it could. She knew it

was. There was no other table that the waiter could be coming to. What am I to do? she asked herself. What am I to do? She felt lost, helpless, incredibly childlike in the presence of this experience, this knowledge of the world.

Another moment and the waiter would be at her table. She shut her eyes in a desperate attempt to think, to collect and free her thoughts from the magnetism of that dark gaze. What shall I do, she thought. Through the darkness of closed eyes she heard the waiter's murmuring.

"Mr. Arthur Paramount. A note for you from the gentleman across the room."

She opened her eyes, staring blankly at the piece of pasteboard covered with minute handwriting. To the lad, that message!

She had not long to wait for the explanation. The lad was garrulous with interest. "How curious," he was saying. "And I didn't know he was in England, even. Do you see that dark man over there at the table by the door, in a dinner jacket? That's Druce Mander, the financier, you must have heard of him. He's terribly rich: and famous. He's been trying to get me on the 'phone all day, he says. He wants me to join his party to the Derby. Awfully decent of him. I didn't know he took the slightest interest in me. He's asked me if I'd like to bring a girl with me, to make the numbers equal. I say," he added, "would you come to his party, I wonder? I wish

you would. He's sure to do us awfully well. Do come, Melanie!"

Melanie hesitated. "When is the Derby?" she asked.

"Wednesday, the day after to-morrow."

The day after to-morrow! She had promised to lunch on Wednesday. And to play tennis and to go to a cocktail party, and she half thought she had promised to go with her mother and that young American to a theatre. She thought she had. But she dismissed the knowledge. Tennis, cocktails, theatres. They could go, all of them. Here was something she could not afford to miss.

"Thank you very much," she said. "I'll love to."

She nodded her head slowly. It was to the lad she nodded, but it was with her attention centred upon the dark eyes so closely watching her; that were wondering, she knew, whether she would accept or not.

CHAPTER THREE

THE OTHER DAUGHTER

MELANIE had scarcely been in bed four hours when the alarm clock at her sister's side trilled its imperious summons. Julia opened her eyes and blinked sleepily at the sunlight that was streaming in shafts of amber light through chintz curtains on to grey-blue walls and a primrose ceiling. "So soon," she thought, as she swung herself out of bed, felt for and found her fur-lined moccasins, and shuffled across the passage to the bathroom.

As the water splashed slowly from the geyser, she sat on the edge of the bath reading the morning's letters. It was a typical Londoner's mail. There were one or two bills; an invitation to a private view; a five-line note from a friend reminding her that she was to be called for that evening at half-past eight; a couple of circulars; a letter signed "Mabel Carstairs" expressing a hope that Julia would be able to dine with them on Wednesday week. ". . . it is so long since we have seen you . . ." the letter ended. "I do hope that you'll be able to." The word "so" was underlined. "Cat!" was Julia's com-

ment. "But I suppose," she added, "that I've got to go."

Had scarcely supposed it before her telephone bell had begun to ring. "So early," she thought. "I don't mind betting that it's a wrong number." It was not, however. It was a fretful, worried and familiar voice she heard.

"Oh, you, Leon, yes. I thought at this hour of the night it must be a wrong number."

"I know, I know. It's terribly early. Of course it it. But I was so afraid of missing you. It seemed the best chance; and there was something I had to say to you."

"Why, of course, yes. What is it?"

"It's about Wednesday week. You got a letter from Mabel this morning, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Are you going?"

"Well, yes, oh yes, I suppose I am."

"It'll make things much easier for me here if you do."

A retort leapt to Julia's lips. It was so like Leon Carstairs, that: to see everything in terms of himself: thinking of what would make things easier for him: never thinking whether they would be difficult for her: whether it would be easy or pleasant for her to accept his wife's hospitality: to sit at his wife's table: meeting her and talking to her as a friend. That was the kind of consideration that would

never present itself to Leon Carstairs. He saw the whole situation in terms of his own difficulties and troubles. He was too self-centred to consider her. It would have been easy for her to be bitter. But it would have been of no use. There was no sense in trying to alter people. You had to accept them for what they were.

"All right, Leon," she said. "I'll go. And I'll write to-night to Mabel. I'll be seeing you on Thursday, shan't I?"

"Well, that's another thing I wanted to speak to you about. I wondered if you could manage Wednesday or Friday night instead?"

"Oh, Leon, why?"

"Well, it's like this, you see . . ." And he had embarked on a long explanation of a business opening that it was really important for him to follow up. "I can't tell what it may lead to. And anything like that is so valuable for me just now."

Wearily Julia listened. "If you can't, you can't," she said at length. "But I can't manage Wednesday or Friday, I'm afraid."

"Not manage Wednesday or Friday? What are you doing, then?"

"On Wednesday I'm dining with my father."

"Couldn't you put that off?"

She shook her head. "He'll be alone. I've promised to keep him company. I've not been there for a week."

"Surely he'd understand?"

"I don't know. He might. But I'm not asking him. I'm sorry, Leon. Wednesday's just not possible."

"What about Friday, then?"

"I'm going to a show on Friday."

"Who with?"

"Nobody that you know."

There was a pause. "Oh, very well, then," said Carstairs, "if there's all these people who matter to you more than I do . . ."

There was a peeved note in his voice that irritated Julia.

"Don't be absurd, Leon. One can't put people off at the last moment. It's you who are making difficulties. At the beginning of last week I asked you what evenings you would be free. You don't expect me to spend all my time behind a telephone, do you, waiting for you to change your mind?"

"Of course not, only . . . oh well, if you can't put off either of your engagements, we'll stick to Thursday. I'll put off mine."

"I don't want you to do that."

"What else is there for me to do? I must see you. And if you can't get yourself free, I must get myself free." He spoke fretfully as though he were blaming her, as though he were trying to put her in the wrong. "I don't want to put off this engagement of mine, naturally. I'm not sure what it may not lead

to and you know how important it is for me just now . . ."

But that she could not stand. She had listened to so many of his business troubles. Of his hope of being taken into partnership; of the necessity of his putting through one or two good deals. She could not stand a repeat performance. "Oh, very well," she said, "we'll make it Friday. I'll manage to extricate myself somehow."

Immediately the voice at the other end changed its tone.

"Can you? Would you really? I'd be so grateful. Will it be very difficult?"

"I'll manage it."

"It will be difficult, though?"

"It won't be easy."

"I know, I know. But then nothing is easy nowadays, is it? And you are free, after all, aren't you? If you knew how much I have on my mind just now . . ."

Julia scarcely listened. There he goes again, she thought. His freedom, his difficulties. Never her troubles. Never her difficulties. Did he never wonder whether she hadn't things on her mind? She hadn't wanted to put off Jim on Friday. It would have been a friendly, unexacting evening; with no sentiment, with no obligations; just cosy chatter over a good dinner and some show or other afterwards, something bright with music, gay dresses, lots to

laugh over. The kind of evening that made one think of the world as a place worth living in. She'd have enjoyed Friday. But there was Leon moaning about his troubles.

"At any rate, I'll be seeing you on Friday," he was finishing. "That's something to count the seconds to. When shall I call for you? Quarter to?"

"Make it quarter past. We're pretty busy at the shop just now."

"Quarter past, then. Good-bye, my dear."

"Good-bye." With a sigh Julia put back the receiver, and hurried across the passage to a bath that was in danger of overflowing. Another two minutes of that, she thought, and the flat would have been flooded.

By the time she had finished her bath "the slattern" had arrived.

She was a slattern, fifty years of age, begrimed, with a shapeless shuffling figure, a peaked nose and unkempt hair. Every time Julia looked at her, her spirits sank. Martha Dunkin seemed the composite expression of all the woes that lie in waiting for human flesh. "I ought to get rid of her," Julia thought. "She's bad for me, she makes me feel that nothing in the world goes right. She suggests gloom and ill-health and destitution. She makes me start the day with the feeling that life's all wrong. I've troubles enough of my own without having hers piled on to me. I ought to have some one gay about

the place. I ought to get rid of her." But you could not get rid of a person whose universe in Upper Islington of drunken husband, and gambling sons was dependent on the twenty-five weekly shillings that you gave her. "No one else would put up with her," thought Julia, "so I must."

This morning as every other morning brought its own particular complaint. "Last night me 'usband come 'ome drunk. Fell down and broke 'is teeth, 'e did, two of 'em," such was the slattern's greeting as she set before Julia the coffee and fruit and toast that constituted her daily breakfast.

Julia endeavoured to be sympathetic.

"I hope he didn't hurt himself," she said.

The slattern sniffed.

"Don't mind if 'e did. Served 'im right it would 'ave done. It's them teeth I'm worrying over. He clears ten shillings every now and again as a waiter. Who's going to take on as waiter a man with his front teeth knocked out?"

"He could get some false teeth put in."

"And 'ow is 'e goin' to afford false teeth? False teeth aren't 'ad for nothin'."

She spoke in the apathetic way of those who have no longer the force and courage to stand up to life, who accept life's buffetings with their hands lying limply at their sides. Her inertness irritated Julia.

"What about insurance? Isn't he insured?"

" 'ow could 'e be. Not even on the dole he isn't.

Left his job on his own account. 'Adn't the sense even to let himself get sacked as my boys did. They bring in their eighteen shillings a week regerler. But the old man, why he drinks twice what he earns. Now 'e won't be able to earn that."

"How much would it cost to have them repaired?" asked Julia.

The slattern pondered.

"Well, not less than three pounds, Miss, surely, and how could we be expected . . ."

Julia cut her short. "Suppose I were to advance you the three pounds out of your wages?"

"That would be very kind of you, Miss, I'm sure. Very, very kind; but that would mean no wages for me for two and a half weeks, and with the expenses coming in day by day . . ."

"Then suppose I were to pay you the three pounds, and you were to pay me back half a crown till the amount's made up?"

"Well, if you was to do that . . . well, yes, Miss, it'd be very kind of you, I'm sure."

Her features expressed neither gratitude nor animation. As the door closed behind her Julia sighed. One day she might be like that herself. Old, and tired, with the fight drained out of her. But for her there might not be anyone ready to see her over the rough patches. The thought made life seem suddenly rather terrifying, and the sunlight seemed a mockery as it shone through the window on the

gay green-coloured walls with their black framed etchings; on to the green-painted woodwork of the fireplace, and the green chintz-covered chairs. Life wasn't the gay thing that sunlight made it seem. Sunlight was like youth. They were fleeting, both of them. And after them the dark hours came. "Heavens," thought Julia, "this won't do. I must cheer myself up."

Walking over to the gramophone, she put on a record.

> There's a rainbow round my shoulder
> And the sky is blue above
> And the sunshine's bright
> And the world's all right
> For I'm in love.

The tune was gay. She smiled as she hummed the words; though it wasn't really like that, she thought as her feet followed the syncopated beat. Love didn't make the world all right. It added another complication to it. It upset your plans: so that you had to lie your way out of engagements that you'd prefer to keep.

"Heavens, I'm in a bad mood," she thought.

She felt better half an hour later as she sat beside Jean Ryland in Prew Catholic's establishment in Brooke Street, opening the morning's mail; a mail that contained cheques and accounts and invoices and estimates; a mail that suggested prosperity and success and comfort: a smooth-running world that

did not need to worry about infirmity and poverty and age.

The atmosphere of the shop was pleasant. The long, high-windowed, well-proportioned room that had seen in its days of private ownership innumerable Victorian dinners follow their seven-coursed progress from sherry to vintage port, was brightly hung, not only with frocks and scarves and jumpers, but with the many-shaped and many-coloured fabrics of light extravagance that comprises the decor of life for a modern woman. In the glass showcases were amber cigarette cases and amber holders; gold and silver and enamel briquets; the green and blue of Chinese porcelain and jade. There were metal and brocaded bags, Japanese scent bottles, Indian and Burmese shawls. There were fans; vast feathered fans from Venezuela; and small parchment fans with extravagant John Armstrong designs trailed over them. The lavender-coloured walls were fantastic with Oliver Messel masks, and bright with Cedric Morris flowers.

"It's a place, that if I didn't work in, I'd like to live in," Jean Ryland had once said.

Jean Ryland was a jolly and gay-tempered girl; fair-haired, fair-skinned, grey-eyed, and prettyish; in the early twenties; the second daughter of a comfortably incomed family. There had been no more need for her to work than there had been for Julia. Most of her friends worked, however, and she en-

joyed the feeling of independence that work gave her.

"When you're paying for your own cigarettes and taxis, you've a right to use your latchkey as you like," she had argued.

For unlike Julia she had continued to live in her parents' house.

"I can't think," she had once said, "why you wanted to take that flat. It's a very jolly one, and I daresay it's fun being on one's own. But it's a lot of trouble. You've got much less spare pocket money. And you're not really half as comfortable there as you would be in with your people."

"You're freer."

"In what way? I've got all the freedom that I want. I go where I like when I like with whom I like. My people never ask me any questions. And as it's my own money that I'm spending, they've no check on how I'm spending it. You couldn't be freer than that, could you?"

Julia had replied evasively. "There are other things."

"What other things?"

"Oh, well . . ."

Jean Ryland had looked at her suspiciously. "If you start saying things like that," she had said, "I shall begin to believe that you're not living in that flat alone."

Julia had laughed at that. "I'm afraid you'll have

to search very hard before you find any skeleton in my cupboard, worse luck."

"I'm not so sure."

They were friends, in the way that people are who work together. Away from the shop they never saw each other. It never occurred to them to mingle their private lives. Had they met casually at some party, they would probably have done no more than smile at one another. If one of them were to leave it would be improbable that they would meet again. But a year of shared tasks and interests had bred between them a genuine if incomplete intimacy. They knew nothing of each other, yet they knew each other. Julia's dark mood passed as she sat by Jean, opening the letters, filing, arranging, docketing the orders and invoices and cheques; as afterwards they set about the preliminaries of the morning's work: the choice of models: the dressing of showcases: as later she answered telephones, interviewed clients, arranged fittings. The first hour passed swiftly and eventlessly. It was close upon eleven when a young man in the late twenties, tall, pleasantly good-looking, and well-groomed, strolled into the shop, looked round it vaguely, then said in a slow, indistinct but rather agreeable voice: "I was thinking about a screen."

His visit caused no particular surprise. In the last three weeks he had been into the shop seven or eight times. He had come originally to help a middle-aged

woman choose a frock. While she had been experimenting with a number of models, he had examined the Chinese jade, asking Jean Ryland a question or two. He had hesitated when his friend had returned with her choice made. "Look here," he had said, "I can't make up my mind about that jade. I'll come some other time."

He had come back within three hours; had smiled friendlily. "That jade," he had said, and walking over to the showcases had begun to play about with a cigarette case.

"The hardest thing in the world," he had said, "is to choose a cigarette case for a girl. One thinks one ought to get something small and dainty, something that'll bear the same relations to a man's case that a woman's watch does to a man's. But what's the use of giving that sort of case to a woman who's smoking all day long, and never gets through more than a third of any cigarette she starts. I'm not really sure that there's any sense in giving her one at all?"

He ended the remark interrogatively.

"I thought," said Jean, "that you had come here to buy some jade."

"Yes, so I did really, but . . ."

He paused; there was a winning, rather helpless look upon his face. The girls exchanged a glance.

"Now, what do you really want?" said Julia.

"I don't know."

It was said in such a forlorn, kindergartenish note,

that the two girls burst out laughing. That laugh made them friends. They felt cosy, the three of them together.

"I must buy something, anyhow," he said.

In the end he bought a bottle of black narcissus.

"Where shall I send it?" Julia asked.

He had looked blank at that.

"Send it? Oh, well, yes . . . no, . . . no, I think I'll take it with me."

When he had gone out the two girls looked at one another.

"I don't think he wanted that for anyone," said Julia.

"I don't think he wanted anything at all."

"What did he come back for, then?"

"Which did he come back for? That's how I'd have put it."

They laughed merrily. "Well, if it's that," said Julia, "we'll soon find out."

They didn't. Two days later he came in and bought a cigarette lighter. The next day he took some bath salts. During the next week he acquired a wire tree; a glass ashtray, a leather blotter; in the week following a jade dragon, and a Chinese tea-cup were added to his collection. And each time he smiled and chatted friendlily, but without any show of preference.

"I think he's fallen for us both," said Jean,

"I think," Julia retorted, "that he's a lounge lizard

with more time and money than he knows what to do with."

Jean pouted. "Is he—I don't think he is. I hope he isn't. I would like to know what he is though."

His purchases had told them nothing. They had not even learnt from them his name or his address. They were small objects that he had bought, and he had preferred to take them away with him. His present interest in a screen was his first experiment in bulk.

"A screen?" asked Julia. "What kind of a screen?"

The shop was empty at the time and they had both come forward.

"Would you like a modern screen," asked Jean, "or a Chinese one? Or one of these imitation eighteenth century ones?"

"Perhaps you might show me one or two," he said.

There were one or two of each type in the actual foreroom of the shop. In the basement there were a good many more. The young man looked pensively at the showroom samples.

"It's difficult to tell, you see. Now, which would you choose if you were me?"

"It depends on your flat," Jean told him.

"Yes, of course it would, wouldn't it?"

"Is it a large flat?"

"Not really, no."

"How's it done up?"

"Well, it's rather hard to say; it's got some old stuff and some modern; the walls are brown, a rather yellowy brown. And the pictures, well, they're rather miscellaneous. What do you think?"

Jean burst out laughing.

"How can we choose furniture for a flat we haven't seen?"

The pensive look returned to his face.

"No, I suppose you can't. But . . . well . . . I wonder. Look here. There's some people coming in to cocktails at my place to-night. Couldn't you come and then you'd tell me?"

Julia raised her eyebrows. "So it's you, then," that look said to Jean. A feeling of pride, of conquest, sent the blood quickly through Jean's cheeks. She hesitated, however.

"I'm not quite sure," she said.

The young man looked disappointed in the way that a child does when it has been denied a toy.

"Oh, do!" he said. "Please! Look here, let me write my address down for you, then if you feel like it you can; any time, after six."

He took out his note-case, took a card from it, scrawled the address below it, held it out to Jean. She took the card, glanced at the writing; a firm, sound handwriting; at the address, St. James's, Georgina House—152a. Then at the name. She gave a start as she read the name. Read it again, then looked up at him anxiously.

"Are you the Gavin Todd?" she asked.

He blushed.

"I don't know about the *the*. But I don't know anybody else who's got that name."

"You're the golfer, I mean?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

Jean stared at him in amazement.

"If that isn't the funniest thing," she said. "We'd wondered who you were. We thought you must be a lounge lizard."

"Well, so I am for half the day."

Jean shook her head. "The other half's good enough." But though she spoke lightly, a sensation of embarrassment had taken the place of the former easy comradeship. And afterwards when he had gone, having extorted a promise from her that she would come to his cocktail party, it was with a puzzled look upon her face that she turned to Julia.

Now that she knew who it was it seemed to her incredible that she should not have recognised him earlier. He was, after Wethered and Tolley, the best known English amateur of his day. He was a less fine player than Tolley, though he had on occasions beaten him. But in a way they had run for ten years, side by side in friendly rivalry. Todd was the complete opposite of Tolley. He had been at Cambridge when Tolley had been at Oxford. He was a precise, rather than a powerful hitter. Where Tolley was large, expansive, genial, he was reserved, slight, dap-

per. Tom Webster had caricatured him as playing a championship match in evening dress. He was the cartoonist's foil to Tolley. He was as familiar a figure in Webster's almanac as Inman and Percy Fender and Joe Beckett. Jean Ryland could not realise why she had not recognised him.

"We ought to have spotted him at once," she said. "Only when you're not on the look-out for its being anyone . . . I'm glad he's not a lounge lizard, anyhow. But——" she paused.

"I don't know if I ought to have said I'd go to his cocktail party," she added.

"Silly one, why not?"

"I don't know him."

"You know him very well, I should have thought."

"Yes, but . . ." Jean Ryland hesitated. "It's so difficult," she said. "He doesn't know anything about me: who I am, what I am. He does not see me against a background. I don't know what he's thinking about me. To him I'm probably just any independent modern girl. At least, I suppose that's what he's thinking. One never knows where one is with a man, nowadays."

"He doesn't any more know where he is with you."

"I daresay, but that doesn't matter quite so much." She paused. "Fancy it being him," she said. "For a person as shy and lost looking as that to be about

the best amateur golfer in the country. I'd always heard he was absurdly modest, but for him to be as modest as all that! He's really rather a pet, you know."

They were still discussing him when the street door was flung open, and radiant, buoyant and laughing, Melanie burst into the shop. Nobody looking at her could have believed that she had seen that day's dawn break over Soho. Her cheeks were glowing, her body vibrant with vitality. "What it is to be nineteen," thought Julia.

"Darling," said Melanie: "I want a frock. A dream of a frock. And it's got to be ready by to-morrow morning."

Julia laughed. "From what I remember of your other raids on us, you won't have decided what you want by to-morrow evening!"

"Ah, but not this time, darling. I'm in a hurry: a real hurry. And besides, this time I'm going to take your advice. As I should have done, of course, the other time. You were quite right about that frock. The gold tissue one. I saw it at the Vienna last night on another woman. It was so utterly my frock, that it spoilt my whole evening for me."

"No fun at all?"

"Oh, a bit afterwards, at least. The Green Grotto's fun, and there's a reasonable cabaret at the Heliotrope."

"And the lad?"

"Dumb, my dear, so dumb, or at least, if he only were dumb. But don't let's talk about the lad. Let's rummage."

They rummaged.

Frock after frock was taken from box and hanger, was examined, discarded, or set aside. With a keen, concentrated intensity she eliminated from that large stock the dresses she would not need.

"Who's going to get the benefit of all this?" asked Julia.

"The Derby."

"I didn't know you were going there."

"I only decided to last night."

"Who are you going with?"

"The lad."

"He'd be flattered if he knew all this trouble were being taken over him."

"It's not for him. I'm going with a party."

"Whose party?"

"Now, what was the name, let me think now. A sallow, interesting-looking man, what was his name? Ah, that's it. Yes, Druce Mander."

Julia started at the name.

"Druce Mander," she said. "I didn't know you knew him!"

"I don't. He's Arthur's friend."

"Then, how . . ."

With an arm flung round her waist, and a kiss dropped lightly on her cheek, Melanie cut her sister

short. "Silliest, so inquisitive," she said. "I haven't met the man at all; he was at the Vienna last night. And he saw Arthur and sent a note over asking him if he'd join his party at the Derby, and telling him to bring a friend; a girl friend. And as I was with him, the poor pet had to ask me. Though I'm sure there's some poppet he'd have rather taken. So that's all there is to it. And you mustn't start worrying about me and playing the heavy sister or I'll get cross, and, darling, I couldn't bear that, because I'm oh, so fond of you."

Julia made no reply. It probably was all right. And she was a fool to worry. You only exasperated people by asking questions. Melanie hadn't met Mander. Probably Melanie wouldn't say more than "Good morning," and "Good-bye" to him during the whole picnic. It was absurd for her to worry. Yet she couldn't help worrying.

Four years ago, after all, she had been so completely in the position in which Melanie was now: young, untried, confident: with not a doubt of her own future; nor of her capacity to direct that future.

"If anything were to happen to that child . . ." she thought.

CHAPTER FOUR

A FORTUNE TELLER

It was a quarter to twelve when Melanie walked out into the sunlit length of Brooke Street. A quarter of an hour to get to Bayswater. Ample, surely she thought, as she paused in the doorway of a taxi, searching in her bag for the sheet of paper across which had been scrawled in purple lipstick "Armantine, 56d, Severn Street." She had been given the address a week back at a dance. "Darling, you must go to her—the perfect fortune teller," she had been told. "She's an absolute marvel. She told me . . . but I can't tell you that. It would be telling you too much. But it was simply uncanny: the things she knew about my past. And most of what she told me about the future's come true. You simply must go there."

So the address had been scrawled on the back of an envelope in lipstick. And the next morning she had rung up, giving her friend's name as a reference, to be told that Madame Armantine could not possibly see her for a week. She had pleaded, she had cajoled, she had threatened. But the voice had

remained suavely unaccommodating. It was useless to argue. Madame Armantine, the voice maintained, was very busy; it was impossible to arrange anything for a week. So an appointment had been made, and here she was, eight days later, being rushed through London, a little thrilled, a little nervous.

It was the first time she had ever been to a fortune teller. The prelude to it was disappointing. She had expected that it would be more dramatic: more melodramatic. She had pictured fortune-telling in terms of crystals and darkened rooms and mirrors. She had not expected to arrive at an ordinary block of flats; to be transported by an ordinary lift to an ordinary fourth floor; to have an ordinary door opened for her by an ordinary servant: to be shown into a large clean bare-walled sparsely furnished room that gave the impression of never having been lived in and would have looked like a dentist's waiting room had there been copies of the *Sketch* and *Bystander* on the central table. And the slim dark-skinned woman who rose to greet her was conventionally clothed in a fawn-coloured coat and skirt.

It was not until Madame Armantine began to speak that Melanie became conscious of drama. Madame Armantine spoke in a quick precise voice, sitting forward on the extreme edge of an armchair, her back to the light, drawing with the third finger of her right hand straight lines along the blue upholstery.

"You were born in October 1911, but you are an old soul," she said. "You are an old soul, seeing new things. You want excitement, you want movement; you want new things, new faces. You are so anxious for these new things, that you are selfish. Excuse me. You will grow out of that selfishness. You are generous. You hurt people, but you do not mean to hurt them."

That's true, thought Melanie. I am selfish, I suppose. Life's so full of so many things, I don't want to miss any of them. And when people seem to be standing in my way . . . but I don't mean to hurt them. When they are hurt it's usually their own fault. How could one help hurting people like the lad. They hurt themselves. She didn't ask them to fall in love with her. I'm not a flirt, she thought. I like them, I like going about with them. Why can't they be content with that. Why must they spoil things. This woman understands that. She's marvellous. I am glad I came.

"You must be careful, my child," the voice continued. "You are experimenting. You don't know what you want, you are asking life to teach you. But that is dangerous. You must be on your guard. You might make mistakes that cannot be remedied."

The voice for all that it was precise and quick, had a numbing, hypnotic quality. It was lovely sitting there, listening. She was marvellous, this woman; she understood you, was kind to you.

There was nothing you could not say to her, nothing you could not tell her.

"You are going to have difficulties, my child," the voice was saying, "with one of your relations, a parent, no not a parent, with a cousin, an aunt, a sister. With a sister, yes, an elder sister. And you must be patient because there are things in your sister's life which you do not know about that are making her behave like that."

Melanie had started at the word sister; Julia; her outburst last night and her anxiety that morning. How incredible that this woman should have known that; that she should even have known she had a sister. If only she would tell her more like that, more of what was to happen to her: when she would marry: when she would fall in love: whether she had already met the person she was to fall in love with. There was so much she would like to know: about that man Druce Mander whom she had seen last in the Vienna. What was he going to mean to her, was he going to mean anything? She wished she could ask the woman. But that would be scarcely fair. Anyone could tell fortunes if you gave them the facts to guess from. Those things had to be ferreted out for themselves. That was the marvellous thing about this woman, she did ferret them out.

"There are people in love with you; several people in love with you. There will be more."

Quickly the flow of words continued, pausing only after the occasional "Excuse me," with which Madame Armantine would follow a piece of criticism. In a kind of doze Melanie listened. She scarcely heard what was being said to her.

When she came out again into the sunlight she shook herself. It had been marvellous. It had been worth much more than the guinea she had paid for it. She would go again. Certainly she would go again; never had she felt herself so understood before. All that had been said to her had been so true. And there was so much of it that she had forgotten. So little, when it came to that, that she could remember. What was it that she had said, that dark-skinned, quick-voiced woman? Something about hurting people and about not meaning to. Something about Julia: a quarrel with her: and having to be patient with her, dear silly Julia, because there were things in Julia's life that she knew nothing of; though what could there be to worry Julia she did not see: Julia who had her own flat and could do what she liked, when she liked. And what else was it she had said. About her not knowing what she wanted. Melanie laughed at that. Not know what she wanted. Why surely that was the one thing she did know. It was life she wanted—life. And as for her future, wouldn't it just be a turning to where life was keenest.

Lightheartedly she waved her hand towards a taxi. It was nearly lunch time. She was feeling hungry.

"Albemarle Street—the Five Hundred Club," she said.

CHAPTER FIVE

JEAN RYLAND

In the Victorian era a single visit to a man's house or flat left you with a fairly accurate idea of that man's material position. In those days economists laid it down that the rent of a house should represent a tenth of a complete income. To-day you can form no such estimate.

In this era of soaring income tax, when every other family has a motor car: when servants are hard to get: when restaurants are plentiful: when home life is disintegrating: when people cannot be troubled with the responsibilities of family life: when they prefer to spend their money outside their homes, on cars and in restaurants and night clubs: when for many a home or flat is no more than a headquarters where they sleep and eat their breakfasts and keep their clothes: when mobility is in itself a goal: when no one will be bothered with anything that cannot be shut up and left at a moment's notice; in such an era you may easily be misled by the standard of comfort that people maintain in their home lives. You cannot judge the ex-

tent of a person's income by the number of his spare bedrooms and the spruceness of his domestic staff. Even so and even now a flat will tell you a good deal. Nobody could spend ten minutes, for instance, in Gavin Todd's without realising that however he might choose to apportion his income, that income was comfortably proportioned.

It was in St. James's, where rents and premiums are high. It was on the first floor. Its rooms were high and wide and airy: facing the half of them a rambling mews, the others a network of swaying boughs. "He's rich," thought Jean Ryland, "richer than I thought," as she looked up at the red brick façade from the street below. And again a cautionary instinct made her hesitate. The same cautionary instinct that all that afternoon had been counselling her against the acceptance of that invitation. What was the point of it, she asked herself. She was only putting herself in a false position, classing herself with all those other girls whom experience had taught him to despise. He had met her in a shop, and she had resolved that in her case none of the cynical masculine prophecies about feminine emancipation were going to be justified.

Before she had been in the shop a week she had decided that. There was much that during that week had come to her as a shock. She had wanted to work. She had wanted the feeling of independence that work would give her. But she had not enjoyed

the position in which that work had placed her. She had not liked being in a position where people could be cross and irritable with her; where they could find fault with her and blame her because this and that had not been done exactly to their liking; where she would have to listen to abuse without retorting. It annoyed her that because she was in a shop, because she was paid to be in a shop, people could speak to her in a way that had they met her anywhere else they would not have dared to do. "Would they speak to me like that," she had said to Julia, "if we had been on some picnic and I'd made some mistake about the hamper; brought no corkscrew, or the wrong kind of milk? Of course they wouldn't. Because I'm working in a shop they think nothing of me. They've no respect for me. They think I'm something they can wipe their feet on."

Julia had laughed at her. "Don't be silly," she had said. "They aren't thinking of you at all. They're just spoilt discontented women who get hysterical when the least thing goes wrong with them. It's life they're railing at, not you."

Jean refused to be convinced. "That may be or that may not be," she had said. "I've got to put up with it, of course, but I don't like it. I don't like being spoken to in that way."

This slight that she imagined she detected in the attitude of the shop's clientele had made her sensi-

tive and punctilious. People spoke to her in a shop as they would never speak to her in private life. They had no respect for her because she was working in a shop. That was how she argued the matter with herself. And so when some of the men who came into the shop spoke pleasantly to her she imagined that there was behind that pleasantness the same lack of respect that there had been behind the unpleasantness of their wives and sisters. "Because I work in a shop," she had thought, "they think nothing of me. They don't consider that I should be treated in the same way as the girls they meet in their mother's house. They look on me as fair game."

Julia had done her best to laugh her friend out of that attitude.

"Men don't think about girls in that way nowadays," she had said. "They don't divide them into two classes: the kind they meet at their parents' home and the rest: they're just as likely to try and start an affair with one of their sister's friends as with the girl at the tobacconist's. People don't make those distinctions now."

Jean had shaken her head, however. "That may be so," she had said. "But I'm not going to run the risk."

She was free, but she was not going to abuse her freedom. She was her own chaperone. She was as particular as her Victorian parents would have been

as to what men she went about with. She had never run the risk of being treated cheaply. She never went out with men for the mere sake of going out: nor would she ever let men take her to parties for which she had received no invitation from a hostess. Some people were inclined to think her priggish. "You've got to be," was her retort, "if you're going to keep your self-respect." Never in her life, though she was twenty-two, though she had been earning a living for eighteen months, had she accepted an invitation as casual as Gavin Todd's.

"And probably in two hours' time I shall be regretting it," she thought, as she climbed the stairs.

For she did not believe that it had been to ask her advice that he had invited her to his flat. That was simply an excuse: so that he would be able to explain her to his friends; to say "here is Jean Ryland, who's going to tell me what screen to buy." She would be presented as a shop girl to his friends, though it was not really as a shop girl that she was being invited there. She was being placed in a hopelessly false position. The temptation to turn away from St. James's to the tubes and buses of Piccadilly was very strong, as she hesitated on the mat outside his door. What was the use, she asked herself. Todd only thought of her as one of these modern girls with whom it was always worth trying to see how the land lay. He had success and money. There had been, there were probably at this very moment num-

berless women in his life. It was absurd to imagine that she meant anything to him. It was on his part no more than a casual attraction. Probably this cocktail party would be the last she would ever see of him. He must know so many attractive women. He would think nothing of her when he saw her side by side with them, in comparison with them.

The most that it could lead to would be a dinner, a misunderstanding, unhappy memories. And she didn't want to quarrel. She didn't want to have unhappy memories of him. He was so nice. It would be much better to go away before she began spoiling things. And she would have gone if she could have mustered the courage to face Julia's mockery the next morning. But that she could not do. She would rather make a man hate her than a girl laugh at her. She had got to see it through.

She pressed on the bell more firmly and more lengthily than ordinarily she would have done. She was nervous: with a nervousness that made her truculent. But she was more curious than nervous. She wanted to know more about Gavin Todd: what he was like: how he lived: what friends he had: what people and things he had about him. She looked inquisitively at the hatchet-faced butler who opened the door for her: the one person who rumour had it would be respectless for her host: from whom she could have learnt, had she dared to ask and he to tell her, all that puzzled her.

If only she could ask him, she thought, as she followed him down a narrow passage out of which doors opened on either side, to a door from behind which came the sound of voices. "Will it be an awful crush?" she wondered.

Actually there were fifteen to twenty people in the long high Georgian room from whose bowed window frames the deep brown and gold of a brocade fell in dusky folds. But the room was large enough to seem neither noisy nor crowded, so that she was spared that wretched feeling of arriving at a party where you know scarcely anyone and that is so full of noise and people that you do not expect your host to realise that you have arrived. She had scarcely walked into the room before Todd had jumped to his feet from the stool he had been sitting on and came across to her.

"This is nice," he said. "I was so afraid as I watched the clock go round that you'd not be coming. Come over and join us. There's room here on the chesterfield. Let's see, do you know any of us?"

She did not. Introductions were rattled through, and, "we were just discussing," he went on "whether negroes ought to be allowed in restaurants."

"And I was just saying," a girl cut in, "that colour prejudice was just absurd. That if a negro's nice, he's as nice as any white man, and that there's no reason why we shouldn't have them round us."

"But I've been in the Southern States," a man

retorted, "and I know that the negro you see over here is just one in about eighty thousand: that the average negro is little better than an animal; that it'll be a good many centuries before he's anything more than one, and that unless he's kept thoroughly in his place we're going to have a precious lot of trouble with him."

"I don't see," said the girl, "that that need worry us."

"Needn't it!" the American retorted. "You've got most of the West Indies, a big chunk of Africa, and though there's all the difference in the world between a negro and a Hindoo or Malay, what do you imagine that they're going to think in India and Singapore when they read about negroes dancing with white women, and hear negroes boasting of their success with them?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose from the Empire's point of view that's very tragic. But you must consider us. You can't blame us, you know, when three quarters of the men we know are fairies."

There was a laugh at that. A laugh in which Jean Ryland joined. She was happy and at ease. She felt that she was accepted, absorbed into the group, a part of the conversation though she had not spoken. Todd was smiling at her; friendlily encouraging. "Don't worry," his smile said, "you're among friends here." And a cocktail had been brought to her. Its

cool sweetness warmed her veins. "It's not in the least as I was afraid it was going to be," she thought. "He treats me just as he's treated all the others. He's not tried to explain me. He was too nice for that." Gratefully she smiled back at him, not telling herself that that not explaining was no proof of Todd's particular and peculiar pleasantness: but the idiom of the hour. The day had passed when people had to be explained: life was too diffuse, too cosmopolitan; there were too many people; the standards too relative and temporary. In the third decade of the twentieth century people only had to look all right to be thought all right. That Jean Ryland had not the experience to realise. She was content to sit there, joining in the talk now and again, interested in it, glancing round the room, appreciating the quality of its unostentatious taste, the solitary book-case, the steel engravings, the deep pile carpet, the lacquer cabinet: appreciating, too, the unostentatious skill with which Todd controlled his party, moving from group to group, seeing that the glasses were kept filled, only joining in the conversation when the conversation flagged, or to draw into it some guest or other who had not spoken.

He's charming, she thought, really charming. And she was glad and happy that his eyes should turn so often in her direction to make sure that she was at home there, that she was enjoying herself among people that she was meeting for the first time. He

was so nice that it was hard to believe that he was so famous.

At her side they were discussing a challenge match that he would be playing on Thursday against Merivale, the American champion. "Gavin ought to win," one of them was saying. "Think of the smashing he gave him at St. Andrews two years ago!"

"Yes, I know," the answer came. "But Gavin's out of practice. Two years ago he was playing seven days a week. Now he's in the city and working pretty hard there."

Jean gave a start. She had not known before that Gavin had a job. She had thought he did nothing except play golf and amuse himself. She was glad he worked. It was amusing to compare him as he really was with the lounge lizard for which Julia had taken him. How glad she was that she had come. What an idiot she would have been not to have. She should have known that he would be nice to her. She was only sorry when the party began to disperse that she should have seen so little of him.

"I've so enjoyed myself," she said as she went up to say good-bye. "It has been fun. It was nice of you to ask me."

"But you are not going. You've only just arrived."

"I've been hours."

"But I've seen nothing of you. And you haven't seen any of my toys. There are some books and pictures that might amuse you; this, for instance."

From the mantelpiece he handed her a small Chinese scent-bottle. "The figures are painted inside the glass," he said. "I've never managed to find out how they got them there. That's rather jolly, too: Limoges."

He showed her the things casually, as though they were less possessions than subjects for talk, for the exchange of ideas, for the comparing of mutual tastes.

There was plenty to discuss.

It was an Adams table that stood in the centre of the formal red-curtained dining-room. On the walls were eighteenth-century racing prints. The long, low sideboard was bright with heavy candelabra. There were Persian rugs on the floor of the narrow hall. The solitary Chippendale book-case was bright with bindings: calf and vellum and morocco. The engravings upon the primrose-coloured walls were Fragonards. It was a man's flat. But the flat of a man with a fastidious, almost feminine taste, and with the means to indulge that taste.

As they strolled from room to room, chattering casually, she felt that the making of each indifferent remark was deepening that sense of intimacy between them of which she had been conscious from the first moment that he had walked into the shop.

He made no reference to the screen. It had been an excuse that screen, then, as had been all those other things that he had bought. It was to see her that he had come into the shop. The knowledge thrilled her. She was happy, absurdly happy that it was to see her, not to have her advice that he had asked her to his party. It was regretfully that as they walked back into the hall she turned towards the door.

"I really must go now," she said.

He looked at her quizzically.

"Really?"

"I'm dining at eight. It's twenty to. As it is I shall be too late to dress."

"And it is as important as all that?"

"I don't know what you mean by it being important. My people don't like being kept waiting."

"So you've parents, then?"

"Naturally. What did you think?"

"I don't know what I did think."

"Didn't bother to, I suppose?"

She spoke quickly, irritably. But his smile was gentle and reassuring. "I thought you were nice," he said. "I was content to leave it there." And there was a softness in his voice that warmed her.

"That's nice of you," she said, as she stretched out her hand in leave-taking.

It was a small hand, compact and practical. He held it in his, turning the fingers over.

"I wish you hadn't got to go," he said. "I wish that dinner wasn't as important as all that. If it wasn't, I'd have asked you to stay and have some food with me. We'd have gone out into the country. By the river somewhere. It would have been nice, you know."

He looked at her interrogatively, persuasively; not urgingly, but insidiously.

"Is the dinner really as important as all that?" he asked.

She hesitated. Important? Of course it wasn't; not really. As far as she knew there would be just the family: not anyone certainly whom her people would expect her to be there for. And the grey eyes were mockingly affectionate, and the fingers were gentle that fondled hers.

"It would be nice, you know," that voice insisted. "Don't you think that if it wasn't too important you might ring up and make some excuse or other?" Had he pleaded more, it would have been easier to resist. And she did not want to resist. She wanted to drive away from the heat and dust of London into the cool sweetness of a country twilight. She wanted to know more of this man who had excited her curiosity for so long. She wanted to hear his voice and to watch his hands, to feel the warmth of his smile on her.

"All right," she said, "I'll come."

His car was parked in St. James's Square. It was

a racing model, low and long, bronze painted with silvered fittings, and deep grey leathered seats. As they drove westwards along Piccadilly she watched admiringly the skill and sureness with which he guided his way through the traffic. He did not speak. And she was grateful to him for letting her savour in silence the moment's glamour, the moment's peace.

The sun had set, the air was cooling. The pale green of the sky was deepening to violet; a violet through which the first stars would soon be shining faintly. In a few moments they would be away from London; from the noise of its traffic, its trains and lorries, its crowded pavements. Soon they would have swung on to the curved concrete of the Great West Road, the roofs and chimney-pots would be at the back of them. They would know the freedom and the thrill of speed; with the needle flickering between fifty-five and sixty, with the engine sobbing softly, gratefully. On either side of them would be green spaces, shadowing trees and haystacks, and browsing cattle. In the west, growing brighter from mile to mile, would be a quarter moon: and lapping softly between the weeds against the willows, would be the Thames. In a happiness so complete that it trembled upon the edge of tears, she lay back against the cushions.

Within three-quarters of an hour of leaving London they were at Bray. "It's a Tuesday," said Todd,

as he swung the car through the gates of the Café Hongroise. "It should be emptyish. Let's book a table and wander round the garden."

He was right. There were scarcely a dozen people in the restaurant; the café gardens were deserted. No cocktails were being wagered for on the many-bunkered putting course. As they drove past it, Jean touched his arm and pointed.

"Do let's play," she said. "I've never seen real putting."

Todd looked at the course sceptically. It was an absurd course. There were tunnels and bridges and water hazards. "If you're going to judge my golf on that," he said, "you'll wonder how I've managed to qualify for a single championship. Still, if you'd like to have a shot, I'll give you a stroke a hole."

The attendant from whom they took clubs and balls received Todd with a grin.

"How'd you like to play Merivale on this course, Sir?" he asked.

"I'd sooner toss for it."

"I hope that's not the way you're going to settle Thursday's game. I've got two quid on you."

"I'll have to be extra careful with my approach shots, then."

He spoke jokingly, but without false modesty, in a way Jean liked. She liked, too, the deference and admiration with which the attendant spoke to him. And though the Bray putting course was no more

a test of golf than a village wicket is a test of batsmanship, she could not help marvelling at the precision and accuracy of Gavin's strokes. The stroke a hole he had offered her was quite inadequate. "What a pity," he said, "we didn't have a bet on this. Let's go and eat."

He had chosen a table at the extreme edge of the balcony. Only a few feet away the river ran softly towards Kent. Punts drifted dreamily along it with girls in soft summer frocks lying among the cushions; happy and lazy-eyed, their fingers trailing in the water, with gramophones vibrating wheezily, and the water dancing below the violet of the sky, reflecting mistily the silver crescent of the moon: with the jazz band murmuring behind them: its cymbals muted: in harmony with the quiet evening.

"I've never been as happy as this," thought Jean, "never. Anywhere, with anyone."

And she was grateful to Gavin Todd for the flow of talk that he maintained; for saving her from effort, leaving her at peace to enjoy to its full the scents and sounds and beauties of this June evening. He talked of himself to begin with: of his early matches, his first championship.

"Golf's a funny game," he said. "I suppose that it's true of all other games, but golf is the only game that I know and it's true of that, that as far as actual golf is concerned there is nothing to choose between a thousand people. Stroke by stroke there's not a

foot of difference. They can hit as straight and they can hit as far as any champion. Farther and straighter as often as not. They'd stand, anyone of them, a fifty-fifty chance of winning any single hole off Hagen or Cyril Tolley or myself. But there's something that can't be taught or learnt that makes all the difference between the man who goes round day after day between 70 and 73 and the man who never goes under 76. I don't know what it is. It's concentration probably. You've got it or you haven't got it. And you can't be in the championship class without it."

Jean Ryland had not been round a golf course more than a dozen times. But any man is interesting when he is discussing his own shop, and it was the first time she had met upon such terms a man pre-eminent in his own sphere.

She listened eagerly: comparing the Gavin Todd who sat there talking to her with the Gavin Todd who had bought scent-bottles in Brooke Street, wondering how they could be the same person, realising that they were; happy that it should have been in this way that they had met, that she had begun by liking him for himself, as himself; that she had refused to believe him to be the lounge lizard for which Julia had taken him.

"If I win on Thursday, I'm going to have a dinner-party," he said. "Not a big one. Just the people I really like. Will you come to it?"

She nodded her head. She had promised to go to a dance or theatre, she could not remember which, with a young man who for some months had been paying her assiduous court. He would be angry tomorrow when he read her telegram. He would be huffy. He would write her a curt note that he would expect to hurt; but that wouldn't, because she did not care. For a week he wouldn't ring her up. Then one morning there would be a bunch of flowers, and two hours later an invitation to dine or dance, and he would fancy that his week's neglect had been a good lesson to her, that he had played the cave man successfully. He could think it for all she cared.

"Let's dance," said Gavin.

As she rose to her feet she was horribly afraid that he would dance badly, that there would be something wrong with him, that he couldn't be all perfect. She was so afraid of it that her feet missed the beat of the movement, but his hand, firm and guiding, was upon her shoulder, his body was vibrant with the music's pulse: with eyes half closed she surrendered to the dance's rhythm. She felt that it was the first time that she had danced in all her life.

They sat in silence at their table when the dance was over. They understood each other well enough to be able to dispense with words. Minutes passed before he spoke again: with his eyes averted this time.

"Happiness is a curious thing," he said. "We spend all our time talking of it, planning for it, looking for it, and all the time we seem to be missing it. It seems to be somewhere else. And then suddenly it comes. And one does not know why or how. One thinks of happiness in terms of so many things, concrete things usually, success, money, fame; and then there's just an evening like this, driving out into the country after a cocktail party, and sitting on a balcony, talking and dancing and looking at the river and for no reason in the world one feels that it's squared the balance for every unhappiness one's ever felt."

She made no answer. There were no words that could have expressed what she was feeling. That he should be happy too: that it should be as much a miracle for him as it was for her. And afterwards as they drove back, she did not feel as the lights and sounds of London came about them that the magic interlude was ending. To-morrow she would go back to Brooke Street, to arrange dresses, and file orders and be diplomatic with testy customers, to exchange confidences with Julia just as though nothing at all had happened. But it would be not the same self that would be there. There would be always that magic countryside waiting to be won back to.

She could find no words to thank Gavin when the time came to say good-night. She just pressed his

hand. "Please win on Thursday," she said, and a moment later she was in her bedroom, leaning out of an open window watching the tail lights of his car sweep round the bend of Kingsley Crescent.

Happily she stretched her arms above her head. It had been so lovely. He had been so sweet to her. Nothing had been spoilt. Nothing ever would be spoilt. Not that she wanted to look ahead, to ask herself questions, to wonder where it would all end. It was enough surely to be happy. Whatever happened nothing could ever take that evening from her.

CHAPTER SIX

ON THE ROAD TO EPSOM

Arthur Paramount had never been to the Derby. On the Tuesday evening he had rung up a friend to ask what he should wear. "Dinner jacket and white tie," he had been told, and the line promptly disconnected. "Silly ass," had been his comment, but he had not felt encouraged to enquire further. When morning broke, a grey and misty morning, he stood in irresolute deliberation before the open door of his compactum wardrobe. Which was it to be? A lounge suit, plus fours, or a morning coat? Plus fours would be more comfortable. And plus fours suited him. But if every one else in the party was wearing a silk hat, Melanie might be ashamed of his homburg; a rather ancient homburg it was at that. Which would Melanie prefer? If it were a question of oneself alone it was better to be underthan over-dressed. When one was with a girl, however. . . . Perhaps it had better be a morning coat.

He felt satisfied with his decision an hour later as he stood in self contemplation before his full-length mirror. His coat was new enough to look smart,

but not so new as to make it seem that he were dressed for an occasion. His double-breasted blue-grey bow tie spread creaselessly over the wide wings of his collar. He really did look rather well. His appearance gave him an encouraging feeling of self-confidence. Melanie would be less aloof, less unapproachable, perhaps, when she saw how favourably he compared with other men in the party. Perhaps she would have dinner with him afterwards. He had not suggested anything to her, but he had kept the evening free. Perhaps she would be in a less exacting mood. Why shouldn't she be, after all? There was nothing he wouldn't do for her. He had a certain amount of money. He'd have more when his father died. Why shouldn't she take him seriously? There were plenty of other girls who'd be quite ready to.

In a mood of happy optimism he drove southwards from Gower Street, across the part to Brompton Square.

The first sight of Melanie did not intensify that mood. Her features wore a worried look. Her greeting of him was off-hand. She, too, had spent a morning of sartorial deliberation. On the previous evening her father had laughed scornfully when she told him of the visit she had paid to Brooke Street.

"A new frock for the Derby. All you need, my dear, is a fur-lined mackintosh."

"Daddy, dear!"

"The first of January," he had maintained, "stands more chance of being fine than to-morrow does."

"Darling, how absurd, there hasn't been a cloud in the sky all day."

"There may not have been a cloud in the sky to-day. There may not be a cloud in the sky on Thursday. But to-morrow you won't see an inch of sky nor a second's sun."

She had laughed at his pessimism, but when that morning the maid had drawn back her bedroom curtains to reveal a grey sky, and spotted windows, she had looked gloomily at the lavender-coloured frock with petalled flounces that she had hung the night before over the back of an arm-chair. It really was not the kind of day for that kind of frock.

"Why don't you wear that tweed dress, miss the red and white check one?" the maid suggested. "It'll be much warmer. And more suitable, really."

It was the obvious, the sensible suggestion. The check dress would be far more suitable to the occasion and the day. It was additionally an extremely smart dress. At the same time, when you had bought a frock specially for an occasion, you did want to wear the thing. She looked resentfully at the lowering heavens. It wasn't fair. Really, it wasn't fair. It wasn't even as though it were raining properly, as though there were the black clouds and driving rain that would have made the choice of the thin chiffon frock impossible. It was the kind of morning that

was as likely to turn out gloriously fine as foully wet.

The weather forecast said "Overcast, some showers." But only a fool would go by a weather forecast. And besides, what did "Overcast, some showers" mean? Impatiently she paced backwards and forwards across her bedroom floor. If only it would be one thing or the other. Wet or fine. But the minutes passed, becoming quarters, becoming hours; and the sky remained grey, and the window panes here and there were spotted. But the dark clouds and the driving rain were distant. "I shall have to make up my mind soon," she said. "I'd better toss. Heads it's the chiffon, tails the check." The dark coin spun in the air, and fell on the beige pile carpet. She bent forwards. Tails! "Best of three," she said. Again the coin spun in the air; again she leant forward. Tails! Oh, well, that settled it.

She looked enviously, though, at the lavender-coloured frock as she went downstairs. How mad she'd feel if it turned out fine. When she saw the lad in his butterfly collar, and grey-blue double-breasted waistcoat, the feeling of resentment focussed itself on him. What right had he to be optimistic and doll himself up like that? She hoped that it would rain like blazes and spoil his hat.

"Do you know the way to Ewell?" he asked, as she took her seat beside him.

"Why should I? And why Ewell?"

"Because that's where we're all meeting. I suppose . . . let's see, where are we now? South Kensington. I should think *via* Puoyoa was the best way."

She made no reply. It was his job, not hers, to know the way to Ewell.

"I think it's this way, anyhow," he said.

As the car meandered through the crescent-shaped backwaters of West Kensington, she watched the cloud banks thicken. The sight of rain upon the wind-screen heartened her. So it was going to rain, after all. The prospect made her feel quite friendly towards the lad. He'd feel so foolish in that silk hat. She hoped it wouldn't be too ruined. To console him she broke into an enlivening flow of chatter. It was at random, however, that he answered her. There was a puzzled frown between his eyes. "The old centipede isn't crawling too well," he said.

She wasn't. An excruciating paroxysm shot through her as he changed gears. "I wonder if I've enough petrol," he said. "I'd better see a garage."

There was, however, plenty of petrol. The garage man wondered if the carburettor might not be clogged. "That's what causes more trouble than anything," he said, as he proceeded to dive into the machine's anatomy. For ten minutes he displayed a grubby vigour, then, on receipt of a half-crown, expressed a belief that there would be no further difficulty.

"We haven't too much time," said the lad. "I'd better spur her."

He did. At fifty miles an hour the cumbersome mausoleum shook its way over Clapham common towards the Croydon by-pass. "We'll be there in half an hour," he said.

He had counted, however, without the Epsom traffic. Swinging out of the by-pass into the main road he found himself enrolled in a twelve-mile long procession that crawled wheel to wheel down the revolving country lane. For a mile, at twelve miles an hour, the centipede pressed upon the heels of a charabanc. Then the lad stepped on the accelerator. "Got to get out of this," he said, and swinging outwards to the right, he rushed down the unoccupied section of the road, passing with proud disdain Morrises, Rolls-Royces and Austin Sevens. "Not so bad," he murmured, "not so bad." At that moment a large horse van appeared from the opposite direction. "Better cut back in," he said.

You cannot, however, cut back into what amounts to a solid tube of metal. He sought desperately for a gap. But there was nowhere a two-yard gap between the tail lights of one car and the buffers of the next. The horse van drew closer every moment. Twenty yards, ten yards, five yards. On a crescendo of cacophony, Paramount applied the brakes.

"Now, what the hell . . ." began the driver of the van, continuing on a flood of unstemmed oratory

while the procession of charabancs and buses and Morris-Cowleys flowed slowly towards the downs.

"The best thing you can do," the driver concluded, "is to back that thing of yours till you find a side road that you can turn up, and let me pass." He spoke with the authority of one who has the law upon his side.

Ignominiously, yard by yard, the lad retreated towards Croydon. The centipede was not easy to handle in reverse. The progress was slow and hazardous. The lad's face was flushed and worried. A trickle of sweat ran down his face, soiling the wings of his collar. His tie had swivelled to a thirty-degree angle. His coat sleeve had rucked about his cuff. For the first time that day a shaft of sunlight filtered through a sky of cloud. Its warmth struck exasperatingly across Melanie's left cheek. "It's going to be fine, after all," she thought, and her eyes rested morosely upon the lad's unhappy splendour.

"I don't think we'll try that again," he said, as some ten minutes later he contrived to enfilade the stream of traffic out of the side road into which he had backed. "Still, we ought to be able to make it in twenty minutes even so," he said.

He had counted without Derby Day police arrangements.

"I want," he said, as he drove into the Ewell main street, "to find Andervale Road."

The policeman who was separating light from

heavy traffic shook his head. "Sorry, sir, I don't know this part of the world. I'm only down here for the day."

"But it's only a couple of miles to Ewell."

"Daresay, sir, but I've never been within a couple of miles of Ewell in my life before. I'm here to direct the Epsom traffic."

"Then what am I to do?"

There was a blank look on the lad's face. From behind him the driver of a charabanc and his five and twenty charges were exhorting him to get a move on.

"Now come along, sir," said the policeman, "you're holding the entire road up."

"But I don't know where to go."

The policeman had one concern only. That was to get his own particular piece of roadway cleared.

"There's another fellow at the next corner," he said. "He'll probably be able to help you. He's been about a lot."

The policeman at the next corner was impressive with experience. "Andervale Road, sir? Yes, sir, second on the right, and over the railway bridge."

The lad sighed with relief, took the second on the right, drove three miles down it and passed no bridge.

"I wonder if this is right," he said. There was neither a pedestrian nor house in sight. "Perhaps if

we went a little further on." He went a little further, and at a cross-roads a mile distant, met an A.A. man, who told him that Andervale Road was on the other side of Ewell. "I couldn't really direct you from here, though, sir," he said. "You'd better go back to Ewell and ask there."

They went back to Ewell. Their previous misinformant was no longer in the main street.

"Now, tell me," the lad asked his successor, "are you a local policeman?"

"No, sir, I'm from Woolwich Arsenal."

The lad drove on to draw up against the pavement opposite a public-house. In a minute three policemen had converged upon him. "You can't park here," they said. "This isn't a parking place."

"But I don't want to park. I want to find out where the place is that I'm going to."

"Epsom's over there."

"But I don't want Epsom."

"Not want Epsom?"

"I want Andervale Road."

"Andervale Road?" The three policemen looked blankly at one another. One of them produced a map. "This is the best way to the grand stand," he said.

"But I want Andervale Road."

"Ah, Andervale Road." The three policemen leant over the map. A gust of wind, a rain-laden gust of wind, blew it back into their faces. "Perhaps, after

all," they said, "you'd better go back into that pub and ask."

"And how late are we now?" asked Melanie, as the centipede, correctly directed at last, swung out of Ewell.

The lad had the sagacity to answer indirectly.

"People are always late for this kind of thing. Mander may have asked us for half-past ten. But I don't suppose that he expected us before eleven."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE DERBY

WHETHER they had or had not been expected before eleven, there was in the geniality of Druce Mander's welcome no suggestion that he had been kept waiting.

"Here you are," he said. "Now, that's delightful. And you've brought Miss Melanie Terance with you. I think, Miss Terance, that I know your sister. Her name's Julia, isn't it? I thought it was. Now, you're tired, I expect, and cold. You'd like a drink, wouldn't you, Paramount? But I don't know how modern Miss Terance is; I don't know if she'd like a drink or some hot soup?"

It was the first time that she had heard his voice. She liked it. It was soft, well-modulated, assured: it would glow, she suspected, when the moment spurred it. And the eyes, the intent dark eyes were smiling into hers; not as they had in the Vienna two evenings back, but friendlily, reassuringly. "We're going to be friends," they said. "Whatever else may happen, we'll be that." And he was wearing tweeds, cosy, comfortable tweeds; and the dining-

room into which he led her was a long, low-ceilinged room; oak-raftered, with a vast alcoved fireplace. On the round walnut table glasses were set out, and sandwiches, and a soup tureen. It gave her a feeling of security, of responsibility being taken off her hands. For the first time that morning she relaxed.

"Which is it to be, a drink or soup?" her host was asking her.

Soup, she told him, and "Do you live here?" she asked as he handed her the cup, "or it this just a week-end place?"

"Neither. I live in London, and I've a cottage in Wiltshire for week-ends. I just use this to run down to sometimes in the evening when I want golf and some fresh air."

She raised her eyebrows. He must be terribly rich, she thought, to keep up a place like this for occasional evenings. And he must keep a really good cook down here to have soup as good as this.

"It's rather a jolly place that I've got in Wiltshire," he was telling her, "an old almshouse that I've converted. I'd show you a photo of it, if we'd time. But most of the party's gone on already. We've a bus down there. It's the only way to do the Derby. One's got to be plebeian over it. It was so wise of you," he added, "to wear clothes like that."

His glance was a deeper tribute than his words. She felt happy and at ease as she walked at his side down the short drive towards the centipede. "I've

sent my car ahead," he said, "perhaps you wouldn't mind driving us, Paramount? And Mr. Bulliwell, if you would sit in front with Paramount."

Mr. Bulliwell was plump, Hebrew and middle-aged. On his right hand he wore two rings, on his left hand, four. He breathed heavily as he got into the car.

"That young Gavin Todd's going to be with us, I hear," he said. "I can't say how much I'm looking forward to meeting him. I have just taken up golf myself. You play, I suppose, Mr. Paramount? You don't? Then what do you do? The Stock Exchange? No, I didn't mean that. Everyone's on the Exchange. What game do you play? Squash racquets? Well, there are worse games, I'm told; but you'd find if you were to take up golf . . ."

Mr. Bulliwell proceeded to explain what Paramount would find if he were to take up golf, while Melanie, with eager eyes, stared through the rain-misted windows of the car. "I'm happy," she thought, "so happy. He's nicer than I thought, and he hasn't spoilt things. I was so afraid he would. I thought he might be precipitate." She was grateful to him for leaving her silent to savour the moment's strangeness.

It was her first race meeting. It was her first Derby. It was entirely unlike what she had expected. Noise she had expected, and crowds, and cars crammed close, and harassed policemen, and people shouting:

that she had expected. But she had expected that noise and jostling to be the preliminaries to wide enclosures, and horses being led round paddocks, with women sitting in front of tents in wide-brimmed hats, and men with field-glasses discussing form. Rather like Lords, in fact. She was unprepared, totally unprepared for this stream of charabancs: these ill-dressed people squabbling and pushing in the rain: the gipsy tents: the rows of buses: the costers: the shouting bookmakers: the swingboats: the fortune-tellers: the Salvationists with their admonitory exhortations: the switchbacks: the merry-go-rounds: the helter-skelters: the Aunt Sallies: the darts: the coconuts.

"It's like Hampstead Heath on Easter Monday," said Melanie.

"It's London enjoying itself," Druce Mander answered. "And London doesn't change. We stop here," he called out. "Now, be sure and remember where you park the car. Our bus is on the opposite side of the course."

In a direct line the bus was less than a hundred yards away. It took them a quarter of an hour to reach it. They were jostled against rough clothes. Rough voices sounded in their ears. There was a smell of beer, garlic and tobacco; of damp and hot humanity. Policemen ordered them about. Race-cards were held beneath their noses. Gipsies offered to tell their fortunes; Revivalists to save their souls.

Bookies importuned them from wooden stands. The lad in his elegant morning coat looked singularly ill at ease. His tie was twisted, his collar soiled, his hat was ragged. And though a trickle of sweat ran down his cheek, his shoulders were contracted as though with extreme cold. Mr. Bulliwell, panting at his side, looked little happier. But Mander in his rough tweeds and Burberry was smiling happily. Once or twice he turned to chat with some one who had barged against him.

"We'll soon be out of this," he said. "It'll be roomier in the bus."

It wasn't much. On a fine day there would have been plenty of room for the dozen people who constituted Mander's party. But it was cold and wet: no one particularly wanted to go on the roof. The far end of the floor was occupied by servants. Coats and cloaks filled a couple of seats. The women were huddled on the straight seats by the door. The men were clustered uncomfortably on the conductor's platform.

"I can't introduce you all individually," said Mander. "I'll just say who each of you is."

There was a string of names out of which Gavin Todd's alone sounded familiarly to Melanie. He was standing next to her and he smiled pleasantly as his name was mentioned.

"You haven't a race-card," he said. "Have mine."

Out of the corner of her eye she observed Mr.

Bulliwell making clumsy efforts to edge his way towards them.

"Do you see that fat man over there?" she said; "all the way down here he's been saying how much he's been looking forward to meeting you."

"That's very flattering; who is he?"

"A Mr. Bulliwell."

"Bulliwell?" Todd repeated the name pensively, then a look of interest came into his face. "Why, of course, yes," he said, and turned welcomingly to meet his admirer's approach.

Mr. Bulliwell's face beamed with delight.

"You don't know me, of course," he began. "But I know you. Followed your career from the very start. Saw you play your first games at Cambridge. Coming down on Thursday to see your match with the American. You'll win, I think."

The young man shook his head. "I shouldn't be too sure of that. I shouldn't bet on it."

"My dear fellow, I saw you wipe the floor with him at St. Andrews two years ago."

"Maybe, but I'm not the player I was then. I don't practise enough. I'm too busy nowadays."

Mr. Bulliwell registered concern. "Now, that's too bad. Too many parties, too popular, I suppose?"

"No fear; too much work!"

"Work? I didn't know you worked."

"How did you think I lived?" Todd laughed. "I

play as an amateur. I've got to earn my living. I assure you, I'm a most industrious stockbroker."

Mr. Bulliwell looked surprised and interested. "A stockbroker? I'd no idea of that. What firm?"

"Corn Adams."

"Corn Adams? A very fine firm indeed. I've thought sometimes," Mr. Bulliwell paused, his forehead wrinkled. "Look here," he went on. "I didn't know you were in that line. We might possibly be able to help each other. We won't talk shop now, but perhaps you'd lunch with me one day next week? On Tuesday? Splendid! Boulestin's, then, at half-past one."

As Mr. Bulliwell moved away Gavin gave a contented sigh. "That's a good day's work done," he said.

Melanie looked at him in surprise.

"What do you mean?"

"That's what I'm paid to do."

"What is?"

"Starting people talking about business when they start lecturing me on golf."

But Melanie still did not understand.

"It's very simple," he explained. "In my own way I'm a fairly well-known person. I've a name, anyhow, that people like dropping into their conversation. They like to be able to say casually: 'Young Gavin Todd was telling me the other day . . .' We're all snobs one way or another; there are a

good many golf snobs. And as people who don't or can't meet me in the ordinary way are glad of the opportunity of getting to know me through business, a firm like Corn Adams pays me a pleasant salary to wander round the country playing tournaments, challenging American champions, and in the process attracting people like Bulliwell to put their business in my hands in return for the pleasure it gives them to be able to tell their friends I've lunched with them. That's what's called playing golf as an amateur."

He spoke lightly but ironically. Melanie missed the irony.

"What a heavenly way of earning a living."

"An easy way, but . . ."

"I don't know what more you want. Doing the thing you like best half the week."

Gavin shrugged his shoulders. "That part of it's all right, but . . . oh, well, I'm not sure that exploiting personal relationships is the jolliest of occupations. It makes me rather distrustful of friends and friendship, and . . . oh, and other things. Still, I've done my day's work. Let's start enjoying ourselves. If we moved these coats, there'd be a nice seat for us."

They moved the coats from one of the narrow seats that faced the driver.

"This," said Todd as a solemn butler handed her a curried lobster, "is probably about the first time

you've eaten in a bus since you were a baby in half socks, sucking peppermint."

And they laughed together, balancing their plates upon their knees, sipping from time to time at the hock cup that was, Todd whispered warningly, insidiously strong. "It tastes like gingerbeer," he said. "But it isn't, really." She laughed. He was fun, this boy, she thought. Modest and unassertive. "Cosy" was the word she would have chosen to describe him with. But though his conversation was bright and entertaining, she listened to it with the half only of her attention. With the other half she was watching Mander as he chatted to a tall, handsome woman in the middle thirties. He was talking quickly and, it seemed, amusingly. The woman's lips kept pouting in a smile. It was a smile that irritated Melanie. She felt she was being cheated. Why was Mander talking to her instead of to herself? He had brought her down here. It was nonsense to pretend that it was for the lad's sake that that pencilled note had been sent across the Vienna ballroom. Who would want the lad for his own sake? There he was standing on the conductor's platform, talking to no one, looking lost. Why couldn't he join up with some one and be amusing? His aloofness was intended as a criticism of herself. It looked as though he were saying, "I brought you down here. Now you go and leave me by myself." As though you went to a party to spend your whole time talking to the per-

son you'd come down with. Really, he was infuriating.

"The first race will be starting in a moment," the butler said as he removed the remnants of the curried lobster and handed her a wing of chicken.

"Heavens, and I've not backed a horse yet!" cried Melanie. "Which shall I?"

"I," said Gavin, "have backed Persian Peter."

The butler shook his head. "I should not have backed that, sir, if I had been you." He spoke in the suave, pontifical manner of a priest hearing confession. "If I were you, I should back Gardenia."

"Gardenia," Melanie turned the page of her programme quickly. "Cerise and blue," she read. "That sounds heavenly. Arthur," she called out. "Here's ten shillings. Go and put it on Gardenia for me."

The lad coloured, hastened forward, took the green note, repeated "Gardenia?" and stepped out into the rain.

"I think," said Todd, "that we'd better go upstairs."

It was windy and wet upstairs. Opposite them, across a massed phalanx of umbrellas was the vast outline of the grand-stand. Behind them in the dip were the booths, the darts, the coconuts: beyond the ridge were the swing-boats and the helter-skelters, the Sports Club stand; in between flowed a drenched river of humanity. "Where do they start from?" Melanie asked.

"Over there by the trees just beyond Tattenham Corner."

"Tattenham Corner? I've heard that name. When'll they be starting?"

"In a minute now. The numbers are up there behind."

She looked behind her at the wide framework of the board, saw the name Gardenia, the number, 5, and another, 21, beyond it, asked for an explanation, was given it, did not understand it, glanced at her card, re-read "Cerise and blue"; heard from a mile and a half away the cry, "They're off!" heard the cry louden round the bend, heard at her elbow the whisper, "Look, at the end there now," clutched at the field-glasses that were held out to her, failed to focus them on the splash of colour that quavered at the end of the green avenue, strained with her bare eyes at the nearing cluster, looking for "Cerise and blue," for the number 21, heard through the thunder of shouts the name "Gardenia," saw in an uncomprehending flash the horses pass below her, turned dazed and puzzled to meet Todd's laughing congratulations. "Beginner's luck," he cried.

She did not understand. "Do you mean I've won?" she gasped.

"Most certainly. And at five to one."

Five to one. That would be two pounds ten. She would buy a large bottle of black narcissus, she decided, as she made her way downstairs. The butler

received her gratitude with complacence. "I am accounted a very tolerable judge of horseflesh," he told her, as he handed her a replenished plate. Two pounds ten. It would be a heavenly large bottle that she could get for that, or would it be more fun to get a bag? It would be fun, anyhow, to hear those notes crinkle into the one she'd got. She looked round for Arthur Paramount.

He was standing, a dejected figure, on the lower step. The smartness that he had surveyed so proudly five hours earlier had uterly departed. His hat was such as a music-hall comedian would have thanked heaven for. His tie and collar were such as a music-hall comedian would have thought twice about. "Aren't I rather overdoing it?" he would have asked himself. The well-cut coat was soaked and shapeless. The sponge bag trousers fell creaseless to muddied shoes. His face was in keeping with his appearance. It was perplexed and mottled.

"Arthur," Melanie called out, "my fifty shillings!"

The perplexed look darkened. The lad hesitated, then decided upon honesty. "I can't find the bookmaker," he confessed.

"What! he's welshed, and my first bet, too!"

"No, no, not that, I think in time you'll get it. Of course, I'm sure. But there are so many of them. It's such a crowd and in the wet. Every one that I've been to has said it isn't him."

Melanie raised a hand wearily against her fore-

head. Really, but he was being intolerable. "You mean to say," she began.

The lad was garrulous with explanations. "It'll be all right," he endeavoured to assure her. "I'll go out in a minute or two. I'll find him this time. I was just waiting till this particular bit of rain blew over."

At this point Druce Mander joined the conversation. "Now, what's all this about?" he asked.

"It's nothing," Paramount told him. "It was just that I couldn't find my bookie—it'll be all right. In a minute or two I'll go again."

Mander sighed.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," he said. "You'll come in here and get yourself something to eat and drink." And taking the lad friendlily, almost affectionately, by the arm, he led him up to the end of the carriage and delivered him into the butler's charge.

"Hand me over the ticket," he said. "I'll go and find your rascal for you."

With a smile to Melanie he was gone.

In ten minutes he was back, with three brown notes in his hand. "Here's your fifty shillings," he said, "and the ten shillings of your original wager. Not too bad for a first bet."

"Were you as lucky?"

"I didn't bet."

"Waiting for the big race?"

He shook his head. "I never back horses."

"You don't like gambling?"

"I adore it."

"Then I should have thought that a pound or two would make all the difference to your enjoyment of a day's racing."

He smiled. "I don't call that gambling. Putting on a few pounds that you'd be quite glad to see back, but don't mind losing. I call it gambling when you're playing for more than you can afford to lose; when winning's going to make life fuller for you; when losing's going to make it so much narrower that you daren't face the possibility of losing. That's what I call gambling."

Melanie pouted. "That doesn't sound too comfortable."

"It isn't. It depends on what you want out of life, security or excitement."

He spoke quietly. But there seemed a vast background of experience behind his words. This man has lived, thought Melanie.

"These things are relative," he went on. "If we were to take your own case, I don't want to be impertinent, but I suppose your people give you an allowance?"

"They do."

"I don't know if they're strict about it, if they expect you to keep within the limits?"

"They're pretty strict."

"So that if you were to spend your month's allow-

ance within the first week of that month, you wouldn't like to go to them for more. You'd have a pretty wretched time for the remainder of the month."

"I should just say I should."

Far wretcheder than he thought, or she cared to think. Even with her allowance paid only a few days back into her account, she did not know how she was going to get through the next few weeks. There were a number of bills that had grown uncomfortably pressing. They had not been too pleased with her the last time she had gone to her hairdressers. She would have to pay something on account or stop going there, and they wouldn't give her credit elsewhere until she had paid a bill or two. One had to earn credit. Nor could she really have the face to get another frock at Prew Catholic's? It would make things difficult for Julia. Then there was that loan that Madge Caroway was getting nasty over. She could go to her father, of course. He'd give her all she wanted for the asking, which was just what she wouldn't let him do. For though he would be far too decent to say anything, she knew what he would be thinking; knew how he would be remembering that long argument when he had insisted that within a month of her having a cheque-book she would be up to the neck in debt.

"No woman," he had said, "can ever believe that

a piece of paper is real money. You'd be far happier if I gave you six pounds in notes a week."

She had indignantly refused.

"I'm not going about like a school girl," she had said, "with my money in my purse. Think what an idiot I should look."

Her father had given in: as people always did if you were sufficiently firm with them. But her father had been right. She had never been able to realise that writing figures on a piece of paper and footing them with your signature really meant that two days later you would have a peremptory summons from your bank: and that banks could not be cajoled as a parent could. Within a couple of months she had been up to her neck in debt. The only chance of salvation was the holidays. After three months of the Riviera with nothing to do but bathe, and nothing but citron pressées to spend one's money on, she ought to be able to get fairly straight. But as for wondering what would happen if the whole of her allowance were to go within a day of getting it, it just didn't bear thinking about.

"Then in that case," Mander was continuing, "if you wanted a real thrill out of racing, I should tell you to draw out every penny of your allowance—in the first week of the month there should be plenty there—and put it on, now let's see, which horse should you put it on?"

As he turned the page of the race-card, Melanie,

with eyes closed, wondered how much she had actually in the bank. Her father gave her thirty pounds a month. The month was not more than three days old. She had not spent much so far. There had been so many bills that it had seemed useless to make a start on them. She must have at least twenty-five pounds: more possibly: certainly twenty-five.

"Now I don't think if I were you," Mander was saying, "that I should back a favourite or a near favourite. The odds aren't good enough. And I don't think that I should back any of the outsiders to win. The betting against their pulling it off's too great. If I were you I should back Mauritius. It's a good beast. You'd get five to one on it."

Five to one. A hundred and twenty-five pounds. She had never had so much money in her life. It would settle every trouble that she had. A hundred and twenty-five pounds. And by half-past three that money might be in her bag without any effort on her part; just by sitting there; just by watching a horse go past.

"That," concluded Mander, closing the race-card with a snap, "is what I should do, Miss Terance, if I were you."

He spoke calmly, as though it were the most ordinary matter that they were discussing.

"And probably I should," she said, "if I had enough money with me."

"You could always borrow."

"I never borrow."

"You could cash a cheque then."

"I haven't my cheque-book here."

"You could borrow a friend's book and scratch the name of his bank out on it."

"Could anybody lend me one?"

"I could."

"But would a bookmaker take a cheque?"

"I doubt it, but your friend would."

His willingness to help her both thrilled and frightened Melanie. If he had said, "I dare you to put all your money on a horse," she would have laughed at him. His indifference, however, as to whether she did or didn't, goaded her.

"Very well, then," she said. "Get out your cheque-book."

He took a pocket cheque-book, tore out a cheque, handed her a fountain pen.

"Shall I make it out to you?"

He nodded. Over the middle line her pen hesitated. How much had she in her bank? Twenty-five pounds. She must have at least that. A cheque of thirty would probably get through. And, if she was going in for this at all, she had better go the whole way in. You could not put down an odd sum like twenty-seven. Resolutely she wrote the word thirty across the line.

"There you are," she said light-heartedly. "I'll tell you when I've lost if it was worth the thrill."

As their eyes met, she saw in his a look that had not been there before. "He realises now," she told herself, "that I'm not a baby that can be bluffed."

"I wonder what he's thinking of me: really thinking?" she asked herself as she sat on the narrow bus seat waiting for his return.

As it happened Mander was not thinking of her at all. As he strolled along the grass track behind the buses he had been hailed by a familiar voice, and turning had faced Leon Carstairs.

"Hullo," he had said, "I didn't know you were a racing man."

"I'm not," Carstairs answered. "Some clients asked me to come. It's business."

Mander laughed. "I wonder if any work is done in offices nowadays. Every one that I know does his on golf courses, in card-rooms, or at cocktail parties. How are things?"

For a moment they discussed mutual friends and mutual interests. But Druce Mander's thoughts, though he kept his end of the conversation moving, were abstracted. "Look here," he said suddenly. "There was something I was thinking of writing to you about. As you are here, it might just as well be said. You know Clarkson and Greys, the tobacco people? Well, I've a large block of shares in that concern that I'd be rather glad to be rid of. I don't want them on the market; it'd knock their value down. I want them to be sold by private treaty.

They're not in my name, but as I'm bound up in that world a fair amount, I don't want to put the deal through my own house. People might be suspicious. I wonder if you'd care to handle them?"

"That's terribly good of you."

"It's not, at all. You'll be doing me a kindness. The position's this, you see."

He entered into explanations. By the time they were completed, the preliminaries for the big race had begun. "I'll have to be her bookmaker for that race," he thought.

He returned to find Melanie in an electric mood. Her face was flushed. Her eyes were bright. She was answering at random the comments and questions of Todd and Paramount. She had passed during the last three-quarters of an hour through a century of moods. She had begun by picturing herself as the possessor of a hundred and fifty pounds. She had heard herself ringing up her friends. "Angel, I've made a packet at the Derby. I'm giving a lunch to celebrate. You'll come, of course you will." She had seen herself ordering the lunch under the benign guardianship of the Maître d'hôtel; had watched herself welcoming her guests. She had imagined the relief with which she would pay off all the bills whose reappearance month by month had grown more and more disquieting, and the insolent pride with which she would walk into the same house two days afterwards to order on the strength of her

restored credit article after new article. She had phrased and rephrased the letter to Madge Carroway with which she would return the wretched loan. Twenty minutes had passed in such happy reverie as her childhood had known when she had sat dreaming before a fire, "if I had a fairy wand . . ."

For twenty minutes it had been like that. Then doubt had come. Suppose she were not to win. Suppose that thirty pounds were to be lost irrevocably. Probably she hadn't got thirty pounds in the bank at all. On Friday there would be the letter from the bank: "Dear Madam, your account appears to be overdrawn"—to lie beside all those other letters with their news of account rendered bills. And there would be another—a beastly little note from Madge ". . . of course, my dear, if you can't really manage it . . ." And it would be the tenth of June. Three weeks before the next instalment of her allowance would be due. Three weeks to be lived through somehow. Weeks that should be the best of the whole year for her, but that would have to be the worst because she would be penniless, because she would be able to afford nothing, because she would have to think in terms of every tube and bus fare, because she would have to refuse every invitation that would mean the making of any contribution on her behalf; every invitation that would involve her in even so much as a taxi fare across London. For three weeks life would be intolerable. "Why did I

do it?" she thought. "Why did I do it?" She was hysterical with impatience by the time Mander returned.

"How long will it be before it starts?" she asked.

"Not long now," he told her. "At the outside a quarter of an hour."

It was almost time for them to go upstairs. In a minute or two the horses would be parading.

Silently she climbed to the top deck. There were innumerable questions that she longed to ask. About Mauritius, what races had she won? About the jockey, was he to be trusted? But she bit them back. She was not going to let Mander see her nervousness. Afterwards, when it was all over, and she had won, then would be the time to tell him of all that she had been through. If she did, that was to say.

Oh, but of course she would, she was bound to win. Life couldn't be so cruel as to let her lose. It mattered so desperately to her. Much more, surely, than it did to all these other people. "If I win," she vowed, "I'll never bet again, no, not ever; I swear I won't, I'll have learnt my lesson. I swear I won't, never again, not ever."

When the horses galloped past before the grandstand she had scarcely the courage to look at them.

"That's yours," Mander said to her. "The blue and gold, No. 7." Beseechingly she implored it. "Oh, please win!" Over her shoulder she looked at the vast notice board. Mauritius had drawn No. 12. Was

that good? she asked. Yes, fairly. In the middle, somewhere. The rain was beating heavily down the course. But she was scarcely conscious of its cold drive on her flushed cheeks. The horses were cantering past Tattenham Corner to the starting-point. Umbrellas were being lowered along the rails. Bookmakers were making their final appeal. Melanie's mouth was so dry that she could hardly move her tongue inside it. "I'll die," she thought. "It's more than I can bear." She looked at her watch. 2.55. In five minutes' time they would be off. In ten minutes it would be all over. In ten minutes' time her life would be brilliant sunshine or intensest gloom. "Why did I do it?" she thought. "Why did I do it?"

Mander offered her his glasses. She shook her head. "I can't see," she said. "You tell me." With her hands clasped tight upon the railings of the bus, she waited; waited for the cry "They're off" to break through the swelling shouts. 2.58, 2.59. Second by second the minute hand ticked round the clock. Three seconds to; two seconds to; one second to; the hour. One second after, two seconds after, three seconds after . . . half a minute; a minute; two minutes. "I can't stand any more," she thought. "I can't. I can't! Why won't they start?" Two and a half minutes. Three minutes. Three and a half. "I'll scream," she thought, "I'll have to, I can't hold it in. It's too much." Her hands were crushing themselves against the railings. She fought against, struggled

with, and conquered the desire to scream; and conquering it felt limp, drained, effortless, so that the cry "they're off!" came like an anticlimax. She was so tired, she shut her eyes. A minute and they would be round the bend. "Here they are," Mander was saying, "look, look here!" But there was a mist before her eyes. She could not distinguish the colouring. "Gold Arrow wins. Gold Arrow. Gold Arrow," the crowd were shouting. But she did not care who led. Who was second and third, and who was fourth? "Second? I can't see," fell upon her ears; "Gold Arrow, Marian, Troubador; Gold Arrow, Marian," the useless unfamiliar names. Her horse wasn't in the running, was back in the rear somewhere. Her thirty pounds had gone and with them her chance of enjoying her first real season. "Gold Arrow wins. Gold Arrow. Gold Arrow wins!" What did she care about Gold Arrow?

Unheedingly she listened, scarcely hearing, scarcely recognising through that babble of voices the word Mauritius. For a second she did realise, and then eagerly she caught Mander's arm.

"Has it?" she cried, "is it Mauritius, really?"

"Yes, second," he shouted. "I couldn't see before. He was stymied by Gold Arrow. He's dropping back, though. Marian's coming up."

Second, but dropping back! If only the winning post could be moved closer, if only the course shortened. "Marian, Marian!" the crowd shouted.

"Marian wins!" Marian was second now, overhauling Gold Arrow yard by yard and on the left three horses were creeping up. "For Heaven's sake," Melanie pleaded, "for Heaven's sake. He's pulling it. I'm sure he is!" A second more and the horses would have swept below her. A second more; but she had not the strength to look. Her hand clasped tight on Mander's arm, her eyes shut close, she listened as one does over the wireless, to his gabbled commentary. "Those three coming up, Mauritius only a head in front, not more than that, if that. They're past now. I can't see." There was a yell of "Gold Arrow wins!" The race was over, there was a deathly moment of suspense. The names were going up upon the board. "Gold Arrow. Marian." Mander was reading out, then with a little laugh, "Mauritius." And Melanie, not knowing whether she ought to cry or laugh, was holding on to his coat as though her entire soul were contracted into her finger joints.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A MODERN MOTHER

The news of Gold Arrow's victory was received with displeasure in the small underground hairdressing establishment in Duke Street, behind whose purple curtains Faith Terance had spent the greater part of the afternoon. The majority of the staff had backed Grand Nabob. There was a murmur of discontent when the news came through along the wire. The genial white-haired loquacious autocrat who presided over the men's saloon endeavoured to be philosophic.

"It's like this, Master," he said to the Indian Colonel whom he was dry-shampooing. "Once in about twenty years you get away with a whole packet and you feel so bucked with yourself for the next ten days that it makes up for the other nineteen years when you lose a pound or so and feel as sick as hell with yourself for an evening. Although you lose much more in the long run than you win, you get more thrill than disappointment."

The remainder of the staff were too young to be philosophic. They grumbled unrelievedly.

Faith Terance, alone in the establishment, although she had lost a couple of pounds on Maiden's Folly was unmoved by the result. It would have taken a good deal to move her at that moment. She was bored, unutterably, as she sat with a hair net round her head waiting for a water-wave to dry. She had spent already the best part of two hours in that chair. She had been subjected to every process of which the resources of the shop were capable. Her cheeks and forehead had been covered with a grey paste that, as it dried, had stretched the skin across her bones till she had felt that her face would split if she were to smile. Then, after a damp sponge had been drawn healingly over her discomfort, there had been hot towels and cream and oil. An india-rubber sucker vibrant with electricity had tingled over her chin and temples; cool scissors had moved along her neck; adroit fingers had explored the roots of her shingled hair; a pretty self-assured young woman had spread pink varnish upon her nails. And as she sat turning the pages of a twice read *Sketch,* Faith Terance irritably enumerated the ways in which an afternoon might have been spent more amusingly.

She might have gone to a matinée; or to the Nevinson Exhibition at the Leicester Galleries: at Tooth's she had been told there was a very good John Armstrong and a couple of Matthew Smith's: Caligari was being shown at the Pavilion: the Hur-

ricanes were playing the Tigers at Ranelagh; she might have gone out to tea with some one interesting: or she might have stayed at home and read a book. She might, in fact, have done almost anything except the thing she had.

Beauty was a responsibility. It was pretty well a whole time job. Her whole day was centred round the preserving of it. There was the weighing machine in the bathroom, with the drastic diet of pineapples and lamb chops whenever the needle quivered behind the hundred and sixteenth pound. There were the morning exercises, the daily massaging of her skin and hair. There were the Turkish baths, the visits to hairdresser and manicurist. There was the steady refusal at lunch and dinner of dishes that, however palatable they might be, were fattening, the perpetual rising from the table a little hungry. Then there was that hour of siesta between five and six, which you had to have if you were going to keep late hours, unless you wanted to look like hell at midnight. Her entire life seemed to revolve round the business of maintaining her looks and figure. It occupied, she supposed, one way and another, about four hours of her day. There were times when she wondered if it was worth it.

It was fun, of course, being described as the beautiful Mrs. Terance; and seeing full-page photographs of yourself in the illustrated weeklies. It was fun. But you scarcely got excited over something that had

been happening to you for the quarter of a century. It was fun, too, being admired, and seeing that look of surprised delight come into men's eyes when your eyes met theirs. But that side of life meant less and less to you as time advanced. And there were penalties attached. She was too practical, too experienced not to realise the nature of the appeal she made to men. What else could she seem to them but "fair game"? She, a woman in the early forties, married to a thoroughly middle-aged husband whom she might love but could scarcely be in love with, with only a few years of beauty left to her. She knew what was in men's minds when they asked her to dine or dance with them: and she knew in advance the belligerent attitude they would assume when she did not fall into their arms the second time she was taken out by them: they would behave as though they had been cheated.

She always had to be on her guard with them. They would never let her be herself. And really when it came to that she would have much rather that instead of telling her how beautiful and unique she was, they had talked to her of the things that had come to interest her more; the world and the world's affairs. When you were young the interest you took in a man depended upon the interest that that man took in you. But later on he became interesting to you for what he was intrinsically; for what he was doing; for what he stood for, for the part

he played in the world's action. But that side of themselves men would never show her. Because she was a woman, or rather because she was a lovely woman, they assumed that love was the only subject to be discussed with her. It was flattering when an important man who had to economise his leisure, who had to watch his minutes as other men watched their florins, devoted an entire evening to taking you out to dinner. But it was depressing to reflect afterwards that during the four hours he had spent with you, he had said less of real interest than he would have to some indifferent stranger during the twenty-five casual minutes at a dinner-party that followed the departure of the women to the drawing-room. If only they would forget she was a woman. There were many penalties attached to beauty.

She often wondered whether it was worth the trouble; asked herself whether women had not got more out of life sixty years back when they had let themselves grow old at thirty. She remembered her grandmother at fifty, with her knitting, her white bonnet, her black shawl and spectacles; remembering her sitting in the porch of her bungalow in Carmel looking out over the Pacific towards the grey Farralones. *She* had not wasted her time in beauty parlours; *she* had not spent half an hour every morning lying on her back waving her legs above her head; *she* had not regulated her health by a thermometer and a weight machine. She had

eaten the food, read the books, seen the pictures, met the people, that she had wanted. She had had time to indulge those impersonal interests that oust gradually youth's self-absorption. She was alert, quick-witted, well informed. Nor was she out of touch with youth. The afternoons were few when there was not some young man or other taking tea with her, confiding in her; telling her of his dreams, his love affairs, his troubles. There had been no need for *her* to be on her guard. She had been happy, serene, at peace, in harmony with her setting and herself. She had got more out of life, surely, had lived more vividly, more personally than her Georgian granddaughter was doing. Her grandmother had had her children, too; her children's sympathy and confidence, in a way that the parents of this generation never had. How much did she matter to Julia and Melanie? They were not dependent on her. The old days of parental authority were over. Fifty years ago you kept your daughter in cotton wool, till the time came to deliver the package, sealed and registered, to an appropriate husband. A daughter needed you then. To-day she didn't. The modern daughter ran her own life: chose her friends: announcing her decisions and conclusions to her parents from time to time. Nor was there any real, compensating comradeship. Girls did not want mothers who would be mistaken for their sisters. They did not want parents who rode, danced,

played tennis with them as their contemporaries. They resented the youthfulness of their parents. They did not want parents who would be in competition with them. They wanted parents who would be an admiring audience. They would far prefer them to be prematurely decrepit than agile in defiance of the almanac. Children wanted their parents to leave the stage free for them. "You have had your innings," was their attitude, "it's time we started ours." People might talk, Faith Terance reflected, of the freedom, the advantages, the emancipation that the last quarter of a century had brought to women, but there was the other side to the picture.

For instance, was this pretty manicurist who had been so obviously bored at working on a woman's hands, really so much better off? How much freedom had she actually, stuck underground, working by electric light from half-past nine to six with no real alternative for her future but a succession of intrigues with her male clients or a marriage with a man out of her own class whom she would compare contemptuously with the men whose confidences she had listened to across a barrier of orange sticks, the refusal of whose advances she would most certainly regret?

She remembered the outbursts of the suffragettes before the Asquith government and the directorial tenor in her husband's office when the first woman

clerk was taken into employment during the war. "For Heaven's sake," it had been urged, "let her be plain." Now men were complaining that women were taking the bread out of their mouths. They talked of women meeting men on equal terms. But where did they, in point of fact? Not in commerce, not in finance, not in politics, not in sport; nor in the arts, except on the stage and in the novel, those two emotional forms of self-expression in which women had always been supreme. It was only really in the less remunerative spheres of life that women could enter into competition with men. How many women had bothered to stand for Parliament? How many women were capable of earning more than ten pounds a week? Women might be able to earn pocket money as mannequins and secretaries, but they were in the last analysis as dependent as ever their parents had been on masculine support. And were the clauses of that dependence any easier to-day? Had they been in her case? She had married at the age of twenty-two a man ten years older than herself. The right difference in age, she had been told. Which very possibly it had been then. No doubt women had aged faster than men in days when women had had babies every eighteen months, nursing them into the bargain; when women's lives had been divided between the nursery and the kitchen. But to-day there was no real reason why a well-to-do woman should age any faster than a man. She had far less strain put upon her than a

man. She did no work. She had her couple of babies which she did not nurse. Modern conditions had vastly simplified the running of a house. Much of her hospitality was staged in restaurants. Science had taught her how to keep young and healthy. There was nothing for the young woman in the middle thirties to do except enjoy herself. Her children were at schools. Her house ran itself. She looked twenty and she felt twenty.

And she had had, there was no use pretending that she had not, a marvellous time in the middle thirties. She had had the looks of a girl and the knowledge and assurance of a woman. Marriage and motherhood had justified her of life. She had her beauty and the means with which to decorate that beauty. She had lived in a day when a woman's private life was considered her own concern: when discretion was all that was demanded of her: when there were too many glass houses for much stone-throwing. They had been, those years, a succession of parties, dances, dinners, with herself invariably the most admired, the most sought-for person in whatsoever gatherings she might find herself. It had been marvellous. She could never have had a time like that if she had been born in the eighteen fifties.

She had had that. But there was nothing to be had both ways. There was the law of compensation. She had had that time, and now as a payment for that she found herself young still in looks, with a husband whom hard work had aged; engaged her-

self in the losing battle against age to retain her looks; living now in middle age the same life that she had lived in youth, a life in which she could no longer satisfactorily express herself: a life that was opposed to her interests and instincts, but that she lacked the resolution to abandon. She had had a better time, certainly, out of the thirties than her mother had. But she doubted if she would get as much out of the fifties and late forties.

She did not care to look too closely into the future: to envisage the details stage by stage of that long and losing battle against nature that she would go on waging. As a child she had respected the boxers who had retired from the ring when the wave was at its crest: the generals who abandoned the power they themselves upheld; the women who closed the gate on love in the rich autumn of their beauty. Now it was to be her fate, apparently, to watch year by year, week by week, the slow ebbing of the tide.

Not that it was any use complaining, she reflected. As long as her contemporaries chose to dress and look as though they were their own daughters, there was nothing for her but to go one better and beat them at their game, and anyhow, dining that evening with young Savile she would be able to be herself. It would be nice to look nice for him. "I think," she said, "that I'll take a bottle of that Chanel, after all."

CHAPTER NINE

THE SISTERS

It was close on seven before Faith rose that evening from her siesta. In the road below her window was parked a familiar and mud-spattered Daimler. "So he's still here," she thought as she walked downstairs. "I wonder how they enjoyed themselves?"

It was a question that quite clearly did not need answering as far at any rate as one of the protagonists was concerned. In the drawing-room, glum and silent, Arthur Paramount was sitting with her husband. In one glance, as he rose to greet her, her eyes took in and recognised the significance of the soiled collar, the creaseless trousers, the mud-caked shoes. "Again," she thought.

"Well," she asked, "and have you brought back my daughter safely?"

The lad nodded his head. "She's upstairs changing."

"Have you had a good day?"

"Melanie's enjoyed herself, I think."

Faith Terance ignored the implied distinction. She was in no mood for a lover's complaints and con-

fidences. But neither was the lad in any mood for withholding them. He was too unhappy. And there was a curiously soothing, curiously receptive quality about this woman that was his loved one's mother. She gave you the impression that she understood you.

"It's all wrong," he said, "though I don't know what is wrong, quite."

And he rambled off into a long, incoherent explanation of the troubles of that day, and of other days.

"I seem to do everything wrong," he said, "I don't know why. There's nothing I'd not do for her, nothing I'd not give to her."

Faith Terance smiled. She half pitied, half despised the lad. Men ought to realise when a thing was helpless.

"It's not by giving, but by getting given things," she said, "that we make people fond of us."

"Then what . . . ?"

But before the lad could finish, Julia had arrived, and by the time that the first greetings had been ended, Melanie had burst into the room. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks glowing. The bronze glint in her hair was intensified as she tossed back her head, by the metallic shimmer of the silver tissue dress that fell in a straight, swaying line from arm to ankle. Every joint and muscle of her body was eloquent of excitement.

"Mother, darlingest," she cried, "if you knew how

much I'd made to-day. But it's no good your guessing. You'd never guess. I backed an outsider. Practically an outsider, that's to say. Mauritius. Only for a place. But even so I made more than a hundred out of it. Think of the fun I'll have. And Julia, I believe I'll actually be able to give your absurd shop something on account of that bill of mine. Enough, anyhow, to get some new ones from them. I've nothing to wear. You can't think just how nothing. I spent so long deciding over the little I have got there, that I didn't see how I was going to get changed in time."

She talked quickly, breathlessly, the sentences tumbling over one another.

"Darling child," her mother laughed. "What is the hurry? I've not begun to change yet."

"But I'm being called for at quarter to eight."

"Quarter to eight? But young Savile rang up this morning. . . ."

"Young Savile?"

"Melanie, I believe that you've forgotten."

Her daughter laughed: a care free, ringing laugh.

"Mother dear, I believe that I've forgotten everything that's ever happened. Young Savile, though. Oh, heavens!"

She raised her hands above her head in a mock gesture of despair, crossed over to her mother, laid her cheek low on hers, and "Mother dearest" she whispered, "you'll forgive me, it's naughty of me, I

know. But I was so excited. It's not the kind of thing that's likely to happen twice. And when Druce Mander suggested that we ought to celebrate. . . . Mother, I can't, you do understand, don't you?"

Her mother tapped her cheek. "Of course, you go and enjoy yourself."

Julia had started, however, at Mander's name. "So you're all going out together?" she asked sharply.

The sharpness in her tone made Melanie meet her sister's glance defiantly. "No, not all of us," she said.

"A *partie carrée?*"

"No, not even that."

"Yourself and Mander, then?"

"Myself and Mander; and if," Melanie added, "you've anything to complain about in that . . ."

But Julia was not going to discuss the matter with her sister. "Father," she said, "it's ridiculous. Druce Mander isn't a person with whom Melanie ought to be going about alone."

Melanie was resolved, however, that it was with her sister that the problem should be discussed.

"Why shouldn't I go about with him? What have you got against him? You know him yourself, he told me that you did. If you know him why shouldn't I?"

"I don't go about alone with him."

"That's quibbling. You've met him in the company of men with whom you have gone about alone. And anyhow, that's not the point. What have you

got against him? I've never met him till to-day. He seemed nice. And if he hadn't been, Arthur wouldn't have taken me to his party, would you, Arthur?"

The lad was too embarrassed to reply otherwise than inaudibly. But Melanie went on as though his support had been distinctly vocalised.

"What have you got against him? Is he crooked in business? I've never heard he was. I don't know what his private reputation is."

"He's not a marrying man."

Melanie laughed scornfully.

"Not a marrying man! And what's that got to do with it? One doesn't only go about with people that one thinks one might marry. What would happen to one's married friends if one were to? What about yourself and Leon Carstairs, for example?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Leon Carstairs's married. You go about with him."

"Leon hasn't got Mander's reputation."

"And what is Druce Mander's reputation? He's forty. A man who's unmarried and has got charm doesn't reach that age without having had something happen to him. If one delved into the secrets of one's friends, one wouldn't have a friend left, probably."

She spoke truculently, unbalanced by the day's excitement, exasperated by the cool watchfulness of

her sister's stare. "Don't you think," she went on, "that I'm capable of looking after myself?"

"I don't think that any girl of your age is a match for a man of Druce Mander's experience and position."

"A girl of my age! And what about yourself four years ago, when you were my age? When you said that a girl was as capable as any boy of looking after herself; that you were not going to be kept in cotton wool. That's the way you talked then, wasn't it?"

"I suppose so."

"And you went out with all sorts of people. You went out with young men, and you went out with middle-aged men, and you went out with married men. Do you remember the arguments that there were when you started going out with Leon Carstairs, when father said that a married man like Carstairs wasn't in a position to be taking a young girl out alone, and how scornful you were, and said that nowadays, with women educated and emancipated, a man and woman could be friends just as easily as two men and two women could be. Do you remember that?"

"I remember."

"And have you ceased believing all that now?"

"I don't know, no . . . of course I haven't really . . . but . . . oh, well, that's four years ago . . . one's attitude alters in four years."

"Not in essentials. If it had, you wouldn't be going

about with Leon Carstairs still. He's a married man, with wife and daughters. And he's your best friend, surely? He's your proof, isn't he, that a man and a woman can be as good friends as two men and two women can?"

Julia hesitated. "Yes, I suppose so."

The anger had gone out of Melanie's tone as she had argued. As Julia hesitated the fresh, friendly smile came back into her eyes.

"Silly one, of course he is," she said. And if "you have your Leon Carstairs why shouldn't I have my Druce Mander?"

"Because . . ."

"Darlingest, because nothing. You're just being the fractious elder sister. And you mustn't be, because I love you so, and I won't be made angry with you. I should be so unhappy if I were, and I won't let anyone make me that, so don't be silly, dearest."

Her voice was soft again and wooing: she had moved over from her mother to her sister, and her arm, her cool, soft arm, was about her neck.

Helplessly Julia shook her head.

"It isn't as simple as all that," she said.

Melanie would not let her continue the discussion.

"Oh, but it is, my dear, much simpler. I'm only doing now what you were starting to do four years ago, and I don't see that you've come to any particular harm by it. You're not going back now on

what you were saying then. You're not regretting that you were allowed to have things the way you chose, are you now?"

"Of course not, only . . ."

"Only what?"

"Only that . . . well, there are dangers, there are complications I hadn't realised then."

"But you avoided them, why shouldn't I? No, darling, you can't think of one real reason why I shouldn't go out with Mander, and I'm sure I can think of ever so many why I should. He's so amusing. He knows so much. And he's been everywhere, and he knows every one. And he is so rich. There's Watkins coming up the stairs, and I'm sure that it's to tell me I'm being called for. Good-bye, darlings, all of you."

Neither father nor mother had taken any part in the sisters' argument.

More than once, however, John Terance looked thoughtfully at Julia during the quiet dinner that they shared after her mother had gone out. What had prompted that sudden outburst, he asked himself: that unexpected denial of everything that she and her generation had seemed to stand for. Why should Julia be seeking to protect her sister unless she had felt in her own life the need for some such protection? Had she in some way unknown to him, paid the penalty of that freedom? He did not know. There was no way of knowing. He knew so little of

her life after all, whom she saw, where she went; what her ideas and her ambitions were. She would drop in once or twice a week at cocktail time, and once a fortnight she would came to dinner: and they would discuss mutual acquaintances; and books and theatres and the chance topics of the hour. But he saw nothing of the real Julia, could only guess at what filled her life and heart. She was as strange and secret to him as her mother was.

His perplexity was by no means soothed by Julia's sudden asking of him if he knew anything about the people that Leon Carstairs worked for. The question surprised him so much that he did not at first know what kind of answer was required to it.

"Smart and Alderston," he said. "I don't know much about them. I believe they're sound."

"I know that. But they themselves? Leon says they're stodgy. Do you know them personally?"

"Not enough to know that."

"Leon says they've got very Victorian ideas. He thinks they'll take him into partnership one day. Do you think they will?"

"My dear, how can I tell?"

"You can tell how likely it would be. If you were in their place would you be wanting a younger partner? And if you were, would Leon be the kind of man you'd be taking in?"

John Terance pursed his lips.

"Smart and Alderston looking for a partner? Well,

they may be. They're both oldish. Smart's not married; Alderston's two sons are in the Army. And I daresay that if they are looking for a partner, Carstairs is the kind of man they'd choose. He's irresolute in some ways, but he's straight. People would trust him. He'd bring business. His wife's very well connected: she's no money herself, but she was born into a world that has. Yes, Leon Carstairs has got quite a chance, I'd say."

A look of relief flickered over Julia's face, lifting momentarily the tired, fretful look.

"Let's hope he does," she said. "He's banking on it quite a bit, I fancy."

In another moment she had changed the subject. But her father had noticed and been worried by the anxiety with which she had questioned him, and the impatience with which she had heard his first answers and the relief when she had heard his last. One was interested, naturally, in one's friends' welfare. But that anxiety and impatience and relief had seemed to be pointing to more than interest.

What was at the back of that questioning? What was at the back of that outburst to Melanie?

Helplessly he put the question to himself. It was not any use his asking her. A daughter was like a wife in that way. You had to know them by intuition and guesswork, not by facts. The days had passed when parents had any control over their children. One must not probe. Whatever happened one

must not ask questions. But that night, when he kissed her good-bye, he held her more closely than usual in his arms.

"Bless you," he said. "I don't know what I'd do if anything happened to either of you."

CHAPTER TEN

MELANIE WONDERS

The memory of Julia's argument with her sister was to remain in John Terance's mind for many days. It had been banished from Melanie's before she was half-way down the stairs. A hundred and thirty pounds were waiting for her in her bank. She had never known what it was to have fifty there before. In two days' time she would have settled half her bills. She would be walking proudly into her hairdresser's; she would be ordering some new frocks in Brooke Street; she would be looking Madge Carroway squarely in the face. There would not be a thing in the world to worry her. And in the hall waiting for her was the most exciting man she had ever met. How could she be bothered to remember Julia's absurd complaints, as Mander's face brightened at the sight of her, as with his hand upon her elbow she walked into the cool evening air.

Outside the door beside the battered Daimler was a long and shining limousine, the kind of car that she would have expected to be Mander's: and as she

sank beside him into the deep, soft cushions, he talked as she had expected him to talk.

He did not, as would the lad have done, ask her where she would like to go.

"We're tired," he said, "both of us. We'll go to Boulestin's; that's quiet. We can go on to somewhere like Ciro's later if we feel like it."

Nor when he had guided her to the rust-red setteed table in the far corner, did he embarrass her with wine lists and large menus as would the lad have done. "We'll have this and this and this" he told the waiter.

He did not order carelessly. But he gave the impression that it was in her, not in what they ate that he was interested. The moment the waiter had left them he turned to talk to her.

She felt proud sitting at his side. There must be, she suspected, several well-known persons in the room. But Mander had not bothered to glance round the other tables, and she imagined those others to whom Mander was known personally or by sight, looking towards her as she sat listening to his conversation, wondering about her, asking each other who was the pretty girl in whom Mander seemed so interested: envying her, most of them.

During the beginning of the meal she was two people. There was the self who was listening to Druce Mander, following his talk, replying to it: and there was the other self, that was outside that

self, that was conscious of the long narrow room, the balcony from which in the days when Boulestin was Sherry's a band had played; the rust-red hangings, the panelled mirrors, the pink carpet, the waiters and the crowded tables; a self that could stand apart; could say: "Look, isn't it marvellous, Melanie Terance is dining with Druce Mander. And all these people are watching her and envying her, because Druce Mander is not thinking of anything but her!" That was how it was in the beginning. But as the minutes passed, as turtle soup was replaced by an omelette Boulestin, as the warmth of the wine moved along her veins, as the magnetising voice flowed on, gradually those two selves mingled: so that she became unconscious of the long narrow room, of the hurrying waiters, of the faces reflected in the mirrors: so that her ears were deaf to the buzz of talk, and the sound of plates: so that she was aware of nothing but those dark eyes and the low firm sentences.

He had begun by talking of that afternoon: of the race: and of her success.

"Gambling, when you're gambling for more than you can afford to lose: there's no thrill like it in the world," he said. "I remember in Singapore when I was a kid, barely twenty-one. I was out there as agent for a Manchester cotton firm, and I'd got into a mess. It's easy to do that in the Malay States. You never pay for anything out there. You sign chits.

At the end of the month the bills come in, and you don't know how to meet them. I had a hundred dollars in my pocket and I owed five hundred. There was only one way in which I could make up that four hundred deficit, and I didn't want to take it. It wasn't crooked exactly, but it wasn't straight. I was pretty scrupulous in those days. I decided to try and find another way of making that deficit good. I decided to gamble.

"So I went down to a Chinese opium den. No, no, it wasn't the kind of place you think it was: it wasn't squalid: the Chinese rarely are. And taking opium for the Chinese is as respectable as taking tea is for an Australian. It was a kind of club. It was like one of the smoking rooms in the Athenæum, except that the Chinese lie down to smoke and the pipes are long and the bowls flattened. At one end of it there was a table with a cloth on it. I won't explain the game. It's simple enough, but an explanation would make it sound complicated. It wasn't fan-tan. There was a brass tube with a dice inside it that pointed to angles that you betted on. I went there with my hundred dollars.

"I won to begin with. Two hundred, two fifty, three hundred. Ordinarily I would have stopped there. My instinct told me that my luck would change. But three hundred dollars were no use to me; I wanted four. I went on and I began to lose.

Right back I went; two fifty, two hundred, a hundred, fifty. I got down to twenty-five, and the sweat was streaming down my face. Then I began to win. A hundred, a hundred and fifty, two hundred. Then again my luck began to turn. For a whole evening it went on like that: see-sawing; one time going down into the fifties; at another time rising into the three hundreds, but never getting to the number that I wanted.

"For four hours it went on like that; four hours of solid play with the punkahs going above my head, and a crowd of poker-faced coolies standing round me losing and winning their ten and fifty cents. Their faces never showed a glimmer of emotion. But I could see that they were more interested in my game than in their own. And it was exciting. It was so exciting that after a while I couldn't stand it any longer. I had two hundred dollars, and I put the lot of them on one line. If I lost I shouldn't have a penny in the world: if I won I shouldn't need to worry, I'd have my four hundred dollars and to spare. I don't think I've ever been more excited than I was when I lifted up the cap of that metal tube."

He paused, dramatically, but not ostentatiously.

"And it was all right?" she asked.

He smiled and shook his head.

"No, no," he said, "I lost."

"But it was a big moment," he went on; "I don't

suppose that anything as exciting as that has ever happened to me. I can understand how gambling can get into one's blood. It's like drink or love. There's not a single really huge fortune that has not been built on it. I should doubt if there was a single big millionaire who hasn't at some point or other of his career run an unjustifiable risk. That's how big fortunes start. Industry and talent will carry you a long way. But to get out of the rut, into the first ten, you must run risks; you haven't time otherwise. And it's so exciting that one has to go on running risks even when one's interests have ceased to need it. That's why you get these sudden inexplicable bankruptcies of people with experience, who know the market, whose prosperity is soundly based. A person who's once known the thrill of an unjustifiable gamble, can't do without it. He must try once again and in the end it downs him. It explains most things, that you know; that desire in middle age to get back to the thrills one had when one was young. It explains why men and women in the middle forties break up seemingly happy homes. They feel that they must know love again before they've passed the capacity for feeling it."

To Melanie it seemed natural that he should speak to her of love. Usually she became nervous and uncomfortable when men did. For she knew that what began as an impersonal discussion of a theory became very soon talk of herself and them.

But that would not happen with Mander she knew very well. Though every word he spoke might be a wooing of her, he would not speak of love till the moment for speaking of it came. Though he thrilled her, she felt safe with him, so that to him she could say simply as to the lad she could not have: "Then you don't think love ever lasts?" So that she could listen to his reply: "How could it, when there's not anything in the world that does; when the world itself sooner or later will have gone cold or been caught up into the sun; when we ourselves are not the same people from one summer to the next? How can we talk about love lasting? But it's no less lovely on that account."

His voice was gentle but firm-toned, with a fuller rhythm, now that he spoke of love. How much deeper it would grow, how it would glow, when he spoke personally of love.

She looked curiously at him: at his strong, impassive face: dark and sallow, with the deep lines running from mouth to nostril and the light puckering lines about the eyes; the lines that were of time's etching there.

What had love stood for in his life, she wondered? What kind of love affairs had he had? Had they been light and many or few and deep? What kind of women had they been? With what kind of women was he comparing her? Was he remembering them now detachedly; thinking, "Yes, they

were lovely, but she is lovelier?" Was she attractive enough to make him think like that?

Dreamily she listened as he talked; reassured and strengthened by his worldliness. There were some men who treated you like a child, who made you feel like a child; who patronised you and talked down to you. But Mander, though he was a long way the most significant man that she had ever met, talked as though he were comparing notes with a contemporary; as though he and she were on a level of experience and knowledge. He made her feel mature and self-possessed, a woman of the world.

He was still talking about love.

"It comes and goes," he said. "As the months and the seasons do. There's no sense in being sad because it passes. It'll come again. One's got to make the most of it while one's got it."

Then on a laugh he paused.

"We're getting solemn," he said. "We must cheer ourselves up. Let's go on to Ciro's."

Ciro's was crowded. It was after eleven. Theatres were emptying. In a few moments it would be more crowded still. Though Druce Mander had booked a table he stood irresolutely for a moment in the doorway. In that moment Melanie, glancing round the room, had her eye caught by a hand waved from a far corner.

"Oh, look!" she cried. "My mother. And there's a

table vacant by her. If it isn't booked, let's take it."

A moment later she was making profuse apologies to young Savile.

"I'm terribly sorry," she was saying. "It was with my mother, you see, that you arranged things. It's so easy to forget the arrangements that other people make for one. And then when that horse came past the post to-day, well, I just forgot everything that had ever happened."

Young Savile laughed. "Sure, of course," he said. "I've known what it is to have everything that's in one's head go out of it in a second. It was too bad not having you for dinner, but a piece of luck like this is, well, I guess it's a surprise that makes the other thing worth while."

Another moment and they were seated at the table next to his, and it was Savile, not Mander, who was ordering champagne and sandwiches, ordering them with an ease that made it hard for her to believe that he was in the middle twenties. And for the first time she was noticing the drawled American cadence of his voice and liking it; was noticing the broad grin that lit his face; was noticing his unlined, sun-tanned cheeks; the crinkled hair and the clear eyes; noticing and liking them.

Was liking, too, the friendly, intimate way he talked to her.

"It's a pity you didn't come here a little earlier," he was saying. "There was a first-class cabaret turn,

acrobatic dancers, about the best thing of its kind I've seen. They're sure to be coming on again, though. You're not in a hurry to be going away, are you?"

She shook her head. No, no. She was not in any hurry to be away. She was much too happy here. With Mander and this young American whom she could not understand why she had not noticed that first time he had come to Brompton Square; with the bright colours round her and the lights above, and the band playing keenly, hauntingly:

> When that man Joe
> Makes that banjo
> Play that old tune I adore,
> San Francisco, dear old 'Frisco
> Calls me cross the Prairie once more.

Softy young Savile hummed the words. "San Francisco! Don't you long for it sometimes?" he said to Mrs. Terance.

She smiled: a slow, long, reminiscent smile.

"Long for it; 'the cool grey city of love'! There's no place like it, no place with quite its glamour. Sometimes I think I'll die of home-sickness for it."

Savile had recognized and smiled at her quotation.

"Do you remember that other thing he wrote?

> " 'At the ends of your streets are spars
> At the ends of your streets are stars'."

She nodded her head. "I knew George Sterling," she said. "A sweet, weak person."

And they began to talk of California: of its pine trees and rugged rocks and soft March skies: talked of it as it had been and as it had become.

"I knew Monterey," she said, "when the cowboys used to ride in and rope their horses up outside the saloons."

"You'd scarcely find room to park your car in that main street now."

They talked of Point Lobus and how the sea broke round it. "There's not much of the calm Pacific there."

They talked so eagerly, so intently, that it was a full five minutes before young Savile turned back with a little laugh to Melanie.

"You must forgive me," he said. "That's the way Americans talk when they get together. It sounds silly, I suppose, but . . . oh, well, there's something about America, it's not easy to explain. You've got to go there to understand. You see photographs of it, and it looks new and shoddy and ostentatious. But it's so big: when you go right across it from the west coast to the east; when you see its breadth and guess what it's going to be . . . well, it's like a great wind blowing through you. Whereas here," he paused, looking at Melanie beneath his eyebrows as though he were considering at the same time his words and her, "you don't get that feeling here,"

he said. "You're surrounded by old buildings and old traditions. At every street corner you're having the past suggested to you. You're brought up with the idea of being worthy of them, and it's fine, that. We'd give our souls for it. But living up to things is less exciting than making things. We've everything to do; everything's ahead."

His voice grew deeper as he spoke. His eyes glowed and his cheeks were flushed. As she looked and listened Melanie caught her breath. This was something new to her. Here was courage and strength and faith. Mander's worldliness and experience and detachment had made her feel experienced and worldly-wise, it had made her feel a mature woman. And it had thrilled her. But this young American with his clear eyes and eager voice appealed to the youth in her, to the potentialities of her youth, to the future that stretched boundlessly at her feet. He was like the great wind that he had spoken of.

"Go on," she said to him. "Please go on."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AN UNHAPPY HUSBAND

THERE are no boundaries to the continent over which the quarrels of married people range. Any spark is sufficient to start a conflagration. There is no such thing as a safe subject.

Tears have been shed over a politician's speech: the treasures of a mantelpiece swept into the grate over an undelivered message. Front doors have been slammed because chablis has been preferred to claret. A discussion of the weather, of a golf championship, of a minority report will have become within six sentences an acrimonious altercation hovering upon personal assault, so that the marvelling celibate will ask himself what venom there is intrinsic to the state of matrimony that reasonable and agreeable persons can be transmuted, once they become partners to this pact, into the vindictive, self-centred, ill-mannered disputants of whose belligerence their acquaintances are forced periodically to be the uncomfortable unwilling witnesses. "Marriage," the celibate tells himself, "is a state of warfare, mercilessly and unscrupulously waged, relieved by inter-

mittent truce, lit by such an occasional happiness as the good hours of an ague might provide."

Such a definition would have described fairly accurately the home life of Mabel and Leon Carstairs. Their quarrel on the morning after the Derby opened with the arrival of an invitation to a pyjama party on the "Friendship."

"The 'Friendship'?" said Mabel Carstairs. "And what may that be?"

"It's a training ship that people can hire for the night to give parties on," Leon answered. "It should be fun."

"Where is it?"

"Charing Cross Pier."

"And when?"

"Wednesday."

"Then we can't go. We've got a dinner-party here that night."

"We could go on afterwards."

"And what time do you think that would be? It'll be midnight before they go. We've got to change. We couldn't get there till close on one."

"Suppose we were to take our party on there with us?"

"Have we been asked to take people with us?"

"I could ring up Ferguson and ask. I know him well enough."

"A lot of people don't care about accepting that kind of invitation."

"They needn't accept it, then."

"They'll probably be offended at your even making it."

"Mabel, that's absurd!"

"It isn't absurd. I should be offended in their place. I shouldn't care to be asked to dinner and then when I arrived being told that directly dinner was over . . ."

"It wouldn't be directly after dinner."

"More or less it would be. And anyhow, please let me finish. I wouldn't care to be asked to dinner and then get told that we were going on to a party afterwards with people I didn't know, that I needn't come, of course, unless I want to, but that the rest were going. It practically amounts to being told that one's got to go home at half-past ten."

"It doesn't amount to anything of the sort."

"Doesn't it? I should have thought it did. Anyhow, I don't know why you should be so keen on going to this party."

She spoke fretfully. Her lips were drawn: her mouth compressed: her eyes bright with irritation: her forehead creased. Never had Leon thought her less attractive. What had happened, he asked himself, to the girl that he had married? By what stages had that bright-eyed, laughing girl become this sour, capricious woman? Even her looks had gone. No one would believe that she was under forty, that she was only three years older than he was.

In the days of their engagement they had made fun of that three years' difference.

"I'm much too old for you," she had laughed.

"Centuries," he had answered.

He remembered the verses he had written her about time not mattering, about how they would always seem the same age to one another: remembered how he had believed those verses: remembered a sonnet he had written to her voice. Had he really described as "angel-toned" this harsh persistence that was nagging at him now?

"I don't know," she was saying, "why you should want to go to parties. You know what it means. Late hours and too much drinking."

"I don't drink too much. You've never seen me anything near drunk."

"I never said I had. I said that when you went to parties you drank too much. And you do. You've got to drink a lot if you're to keep awake till four o'clock in the morning. You've said so yourself, often. And then you wonder that you're not fit for work next day."

"I am fit for work."

"Nonsense! How can you be? Nobody can work properly who keeps hours of that kind. How often do you think you've come back after three during the last month?"

"How on earth should I know?"

"I'll tell you, then. Thirteen times."

He looked at her in dismay. To think that she should have kept as close a watch as that upon him: that she should have kept a score: staying awake till his return. Thirteen times: as often as that, was it?

"I haven't been to as many parties as all that," he said.

"I don't know where you've been. I don't care. You're your own master to go where and when you like. I'm merely telling you that last month you came home thirteen times after three o'clock, and that no man is fit to attend to his business properly who is leading that kind of life."

Her lips were compressed into a thin bloodless line. Her eyes were cold. With the exercise of the greatest difficulty he kept his voice calm as he answered her.

"Aren't I the best judge of that?"

"The results are the best judge of that."

"What am I to take that to mean?"

"That you'd be a partner now if you were working properly."

Leon Carstairs bit his lip. If he were to speak he would lose his temper. He could not trust himself to speak. He must sit still and listen.

"There's no reason in the world," she was saying, "why you shouldn't take shop girls out to night clubs if it amuses you."

"It doesn't," he snapped.

"Doesn't it? Well, whoever it is you take. I don't mind what you do. But you've daughters; you should consider them. You owe it to them to give them the best chance you can. They haven't been a great expense to you yet. But they're going to be. There'll be school bills, and they'll want to travel. They'll need a background. We shall have to give parties for them. It'll cost money. You ought to be consolidating your position, instead of spending your time and money rushing round to freak parties on training ships."

Carstairs shut his eyes. If he were to look at her he would go mad. He would be unable to restrain himself. How much longer would he have to stand, would he be able to stand the strain, the quarrelling, the incessant friction? It wasn't fair. He ought not to have to stand it. One should not be bound for life by the kind of mistake that it was practically impossible for a young man to avoid. What had he known of life, what had he known of himself, in the days when he had fallen in love with Mabel? What conception had he of the manner of contract to which he was committed? He had had the best years of life ruined. Instead of being free to enjoy his youth, he had been bound by responsibilities, by a house, by children, by a wife who had lost her looks and was taking her vengeance of his youth for the loss of them. It wasn't fair.

He had been taken off his guard. He had fallen

in love as every young man practically did fall in love. Only most young men were not in a position to marry: were not in a position to become engaged. How many men married their first love? One in a thousand; scarcely that. But he had been in a position to marry, or rather there had been the possibility of his putting himself in that position. There had been that opening with Anderson, to work in part on salary, in part on a half-commission basis; an opening he would have never taken unless he had met Mabel. He would have preferred to stay on his own, building up his own clientele, sacrificing immediate returns for greater profit in the future. Waiting would have meant several years of cautious living. He had been prepared for that. But it would not have sufficed for Mabel. He would not have considered offering it to Mabel. It was a straightforward alternative. Mabel and the certainty of a comfortable life against the possibility of big success. Mabel had turned the scale. So he had married his first love. With the fate that usually befell first love. He had outgrown it. Most men did outgrow first love. First love was a stepping stone: a finding of one's feet. That was what it should have been for him. Only in his case there had been nowhere for him to step. He could have had such a marvellous time, too, had he stayed free. He would have had soon, as bachelor, enough money to enjoy London in the way that London should be enjoyed. As a married man he

had always been pressed by lack of money. As a bachelor he would have made more money. He would have been able to run risks. He would not have had to play for safety; waiting with Anderson for the chance of a partnership. He had had his youth spoilt. It wasn't fair that he should have had to pay so dearly for those few happy weeks. He had his children, of course. He was fond of them. But daughters were not sons. They took the name of another man: went where their men led them. Their grandchildren would scarcely know his name. Not only was his youth spoilt, but his future was marred, too. What lay ahead of him? What could lie ahead of him as long as he was bound by this tie of marriage? How long could he stand it? How long would he have to stand it?

It would be simple enough when this business of this partnership was settled. He would be no longer the slave then of old Anderson's Victorian prejudices. He would dictate his own terms. Till then he was at the mercy of Anderson's caprice.

He guessed that several other firms would be glad to accept him as a partner. He had the promise of capital and he had a tolerable clientele. He could probably have walked out of Anderson's any morning, had there not been that maddening five years' agreement which had still two years to run. Though even of that he was not certain. In his present position he was not sure that he would care to run the

risk of going to another firm. He had lost his confidence. He was not sure that his clientele would follow him. He felt safe with Anderson.

He would have to wait till the time came when he would be free to live his own life: to make the most of what was left to him of youth.

And there was a good deal left to him, he reflected as he stood looking at himself in the glass before he left his home. Mabel might have aged. But he had not. He had hardly changed since his marriage. He had put on no weight. His tall, well-built figure was no less straight. The curling hair whose blondness concealed a grey flaking about the ears, was just as thick. He had one of those sallow skins that do not grow blotched or florid. The few lines that were about his eyes made him more interesting: gave him character and an impression of experience and worldliness, of having lived and suffered, that would make him more attractive to women. There was no reason why in middle age he should not realise the dreams that had been denied him in his youth. It would not be his fault if he didn't, he decided, as he travelled by tube from Kensington to his office in Ludgate Circus.

In a mood of mingled anxiety and excitement he walked a couple of hours later down the passage to Anderson's room to discuss with him before going down to the house, the proposition that Druce Mander had made to him on the previous day.

A great deal, he knew, depended upon it. Old Anderson could hardly fail to be impressed by his having been entrusted with Mander's business. It was the kind of thing that might turn Anderson in his favour, that might induce him to accept that suggestion of a partnership made such an intolerable number of months ago. If only this deal with Mander impressed Anderson as much as it had surprised himself.

His very anxiety to impress Anderson, however, made his news sound the less impressive; made him, when Anderson lifted his eyebrows in surprise with a "What, Druce Mander asked you to do work for him?" disparage the extent of the commission, as though he were trying to explain a fault away. "It's just a small thing," he said, "something he didn't want to be bothered with himself."

"I see," said Mr. Anderson, "I see."

He was large, pot-bellied, treble-chinned. Seated back in his chair, his hands hanging limply along its arms, he looked like a Victorian caricature of commercial prosperity.

"So it's just a side-show of Mander's that he preferred to have done quietly?" Anderson spoke without enthusiasm. Carstairs was unhappily conscious that he was not by any means making the best show for his good fortune.

"Of course, it's the kind of thing," he said, "that might lead to any amount of other things."

"Of course, of course."

"It should be extremely valuable to the firm."

"Doubtless, doubtless. I'm sure the firm will be very grateful to you if you succeed in disposing of those shares."

His voice was infuriatingly slow and unctuous.

If only, thought Carstairs, the firm would prove its gratitude.

"I don't think I shall have any difficulty," he said.

"I trust not, Carstairs, I trust not."

Lolling back there, his hands crossed upon his stomach, Anderson looked more than ever like a caricature in his smug complacency. Which he was, of course, Carstairs decided angrily. A caricature of Victorian ideas. A ludicrous survival. It was maddening to be associated with such a person. As though one's private life mattered at all in business; as though people would think twice about bringing their business to a man because he had been involved in a divorce suit. As though anyone thought anything at all about divorce nowadays. Anyhow, about a first divorce suit. Nobody worried; nobody except Anderson, that was to say. And because Anderson did, other people's not bothering did not matter. It was Anderson that counted. He could run no risks with Anderson feeling as he did. Till the partnership went through, that was to say. When it had, he would be free to do what he chose. And it might go

through if he could only put this deal satisfactorily across.

Once again, however, that very anxiety to put the deal through was to make him set out his proposition diffidently to John Terance.

He went to Terance in the first place because they were acquainted, in the second because Terance already owned a considerable block of shares. But Carstairs grew so nervous as he began to talk that Terance could not help looking at him with surprise.

"I don't see why your client wants to sell," he said, "or, rather, is so anxious to sell."

"Because he wants some ready cash. The Company's private one; his shares aren't a security that his bank will take."

"Then why doesn't he put them on the market?"

"Because he's afraid that that would lower the value of other shares he holds."

"Yes, I see that. I see that, of course. At the same time . . ." Terance looked suspiciously at Carstairs. He was in the habit of distrusting an eagerly made proposition. There was usually something dubious at the back of it. Under ordinary circumstances he would have been quite glad to take over a further share in that concern. In face of Carstairs's curious insistence, he was doubtful.

"I'll let you know," said Terance; but he had a very good idea that his answer would be a refusal as he walked that evening from his office to his club.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A MODERN FATHER

Most evenings John Terance called in for a rubber of bridge between tea and dinner. There was a satisfying anonymity about a club. You could leave your troubles in the hall with your hat and stick.

He arrived, owing to Carstairs's visit, a little later than usual. At each of the three tables a rubber had been just begun. It looked as though there would be no time for him to play that evening. He walked upstairs. In the dark, cool drawing-room that looked over the green park he found Ramond Humphries, one of his oldest friends, his original proposer for the club.

Humphries waved a hand at him. "It's years since we've had a chat," he said.

Over a dark sherry they began to talk. Of their children to begin with. Humphries had two boys. One was in his second year at Cambridge. The other had been called to the Bar a few months back.

"He's going to do all right, I think. Both of them will, as far as I can see. I was pretty disappointed at

the time that one of them was not a girl. But I'm glad now."

"Glad?"

"Having daughters is a bit of a responsibility."

"Hasn't it always been?"

"Not so much as it is to-day. Our parents, certainly our grandparents, had really only one responsibility towards their daughters, to find them husbands. They had to train their daughters so that they would be the kind of girls that men would want to marry, and then invite to the house a goodish number of the kind of men that would make reasonable sons-in-law. That's all there was to it."

"I don't know that there's so very much more to it to-day."

"Perhaps not, my dear John, but think of the conditions. They're completely different. Forty years ago a father had the running of his daughter's life. To-day she runs her own. You haven't got to find eligible young men for her. It's she who'll find ineligible ones for you. We used to talk about the latchkey as being the symbol of emancipation. It isn't now. Every girl has a latchkey. It's a chequebook that's the symbol. As soon as a girl's got a banking account she's free, and most of them have. It's the war that did it. The war telescoped events. A process that should have taken fifty years got compressed into a third of a decade. Parental authority had to go when girls were W A.A.C.S. and W.R.E.

N.S. working at canteens, in camps, driving lorries, keeping their own hours. You couldn't keep any control over their acquaintances then. You just didn't know what they were doing. When the war was over they weren't going to give up that freedom."

"Does it matter?"

Humphries shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. Perhaps it doesn't. But I'm glad I've not the responsibility of daughters. It's happened too quickly. I don't believe that women were ready for this freedom. I don't believe the world was ready for it. I daresay it'll turn out all right. But it's all very well to say that a girl and a man can be friends just as easily as two men can. Nine times in ten they can. But the tenth they can't. Whom did we have our love affairs with when we were young? There were shop girls, and actresses, and married women. We never had affairs with the girls we met in our parents' houses. The young man of to-day does. We were discussing it the other night, and my boy said that the man was a fool who expected the girl he married to be inexperienced. It's not an atmosphere that one can be comfortable in about one's daughters." He paused. "Everything's so uncertain," he went on. "People have lost faith. There's nothing they believe in. They don't believe in religion; they don't believe in duty. There's nothing strong enough to stand in the way of personal inclination. People

talk about their right to happiness and their duty to themselves. That's about the only religion they've got, I fancy. Everything's temporary and makeshift. There's nothing you can rely on: the modern woman even when she marries doesn't become a wife, she becomes a mistress. She drives a mistress's bargain with a man. She doesn't say: 'We'll make the best of one another. This is for keeps.' She says: 'As long as you amuse me, I'll stay. But the moment you bore me, or the moment some one turns up that I like better, I'll walk out.' One feels one's sitting on a volcano all the time. Just compare Faith with one of these modern women."

John Terance smiled. He and Humphries were such old friends that they could talk together without offence almost impersonally of Faith.

"I shouldn't have thought she was too good an example," Terance said. "She was a modern woman a decade ahead of her contemporaries."

"Ah, but think of the way she was one. You knew where you were with her. You were on firm ground. However many men friends she had you were sure of her. Her men friends knew it, too. She was the loveliest thing that most of us have ever seen. Most people fell in love with her. She knew it. She was too much of a woman not to. And she let them know very quietly, very firmly, very affectionately, that there was nothing doing and kept them as her friends."

His voice which had been harsh and truculent as he talked of the modern girl had softened and deepened as he spoke of Faith. John Terance looked curiously at him. Had Humphries been himself in love with her? Was he one of these men who had been shown friendlily that there was nothing doing and been kept as friends? Perhaps? He did not know. He never had known what had lain behind that long train of friendships that Faith had drawn across her life. It was that capacity for secrecy, indeed, that represented Faith's hold upon her friends; that knowledge that nothing they ever had said to her would be repeated or used against them. She was loyal to her friends. "Women like that give dignity to life," Humphries was saying. "They never let it become a squabble." He paused. "If they were all like that? But . . . oh, well, they aren't. Let's go and have a rubber."

Terance hesitated. It was a quarter-past six. His house was not ten minutes from the club. He had no engagement for the evening. He would not be dining until eight. There was no real reason why he should not cut in. At the same time, a rubber might well last an hour. Faith would be back from Ranelagh by seven; she liked to have some one there to welcome her when she came home.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I'd love to. But I must get back."

Pensively John Terance walked northwards

towards his home. It was not simply that he had been worried by Humphries' conversation, but that that conversation had come as the climax to a mood. He, too, had been telling himself that women had been given a freedom for which they were not ready; had been putting himself in the confessional, had asked himself whether he was fulfilling his duty to his daughters; whether he should have allowed Julia to leave her home; whether he should have allowed Melanie to treat hers as though it were an hotel; whether his treatment of them was not like the Spartan leaving of children in the snow to see if they would survive; though even as he had asked himself those questions he had recognised the impossibility of answering them. He was in the dark. There was nothing that he could do. You could not set yourself against the spirit of the time. You could not make your children unlike other people's children. You had to trust them.

As he turned his latchkey in the door the telephone bell began to ring.

"It's all right, Davis," he called out. "I'll answer it."

A languid, high-pitched but masculine voice answered him.

"Is Mrs. Terance in?" it asked.

"I'm afraid she's out."

"Then I will ring up later."

"Can I take any message for her?"

"I will ring up later."

The line was disconnected.

Terance shrugged his shoulders. "I wonder who that was?" he thought.

Not that there was any particular point in wondering. Faith had so many friends, and he knew so few of them. They existed for him as Christian names: vague shapes afloat in the river of her conversation: vague silk-hatted figures waiting in the drawing-room while she finished dressing. They had no individual existence. They were the people that she went out to theatres with and dances, to Ranelagh and on the river. He made no attempt to keep any count of them. He glanced at the pad beside the telephone. It was covered with messages: would Mrs. Terance ring up Garrick 2530 between six and seven? Mr. Hastings had rung up to say he would ring up later. Mr. Coatfair would be in London over the week-end. The pad for Melanie was equally scrawled over. His own was blank. Fretfully he shrugged his shoulders. What could you expect your daughter to become when she had a mother who spent her whole time rushing from one party to another, dining with this man and the other man? Naturally her daughters went one better. And it was all very well for Humphries to talk about a man being able to trust himself with Faith. That sort of talk might only mean that she had been discreet. A discreet woman always had her alibis. There would be nineteen men:

every one of whom would be ready to knock on the floor the man who spoke lightly of her honour: every one of whom would swear an oath in a law court to that honour. And what did that amount to when there was the twentieth man who knew better and kept his mouth shut. What sort of a wife had Faith really been? Had she really been a faithful and devoted comrade or had she been simply fond and clever? What sort of a mother, anyway, was she making to her children?

During the next half-hour there were two more calls, and in neither case would the caller leave a name or message. When Faith returned it was to the telephone that she walked first. She had been spending the day, he knew, rushing from one appointment to another, lunch, Ranelagh, a cocktail party. Yet her effortless and languid grace gave the impression that only at that instant had she emerged from the hands of the hairdresser. Impatient with her though he was, Terance could not help marvelling at her unruffled beauty as she picked up the pad.

"Let me see now," she murmured. "Who's rung me up? Johnny . . . he can wait. Garrick 2530; that'd be Frank. I don't suppose it's anything important. These others, though. I wonder . . ." She paused, her fingers resting pensively against her lips. "You don't know if Bobby rang up, do you?"

Terance shook his head.

"A number of people have rung you up during the last half-hour, but whether one of them was Bobby . . ."

"You might have bothered to find out."

"They said they hadn't any message to leave. They said they'd ring up later."

Faith Terance looked at him as though he were a refractory infant.

"Of course, that's what they would say. You frighten them. You're abrupt with them. You make them feel they aren't welcome. Of course, they won't leave any message when they hear it's you answering them. And now here I am not knowing whether Bobby's calling for me here or I'm meeting him at the Embassy."

But that was more than Terance was prepared to stand. He had left his club an hour before he need have done: he had listened courteously and patiently to other men's enquiries about his wife: he had ruined his own evening to please her, and now he was being blamed because . . . because of what . . . ?

"I had not realised," he remarked acidly, "that it was part of my duty as a husband to arrange your dancing arrangements with other men."

She turned slowly round from the telephone to fix him with a puzzled, enquiring look.

"What am I to take that to mean?" she asked.

He did not answer her directly.

"Do you realise," he said, "that we haven't dined together for ten days?"

She raised her eyebrows.

"My dear," she said, "why should we?"

"It's usual for married people . . ." he began.

She laughed him into silence.

"In this year of grace," she quoted, "we're a modern couple. We don't want to live in each other's pockets. We've got to lead our own lives."

"Which means," he retorted, "your going out every night of the week with some other man."

He was unable to ruffle her composure, however.

"I don't go out every night of the week. And if I were to, I don't see why you should make objections. I like theatres, and restaurants, and dance clubs. You ought to want me to be happy."

"I don't know that I want you to be made happy by other men."

She shook her head wearily.

"John, don't be ridiculous. You know quite well that it would bore you terribly to take me out evening after evening."

"I don't know that it would."

"But I know very well it would. Don't you remember when we were first married how tired you used to get of going out? You kept on suggesting that we should stay at home. You couldn't work at the office, you said, if you had been up till one o'clock the night before. That's why I started going out

with other men. I didn't want to be a nuisance to you. I didn't want to spoil your career."

It was challengingly that she looked at him. And grudgingly he had to admit that she was right. That was the way that things had started.

"If you want to start out again," she went on, "why, of course, I'll adore to go with you. But you won't like it. In a fortnight you'll be bored to death. One cabaret show is fearfully like another."

"You seem to find them amusing."

"Because I'm taken out by different people. That makes each evening seem a little different. I wouldn't for anything in the world, go out with the same person every evening. And, besides, think how much money I'm saving you. You ought to be very grateful to me."

She laughed gaily, and, perching herself on the side of his chair, kissed him lightly and affectionately on the forehead. She was an impossible person to argue with. He had long known it. But he felt some retort was needed.

"There are some men," he said, "who would feel jealous."

At that for the first time in their conversation her composure left her. Her eyes glinted angrily.

"You don't trust me, you mean. You don't trust your own wife."

"Of course I trust you implicitly."

"Then what's all this nonsense about jealousy?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Jealousy's not a question of trusting. It's . . ." he hesitated. "Do you remember the ridiculous fuss you made when you found me dancing with Gladys Stokesbury?"

"Ridiculous! It wan't ridiculous at all. I'm not going to have my husband going about alone with other women!"

"You go about alone with other men."

"That's different."

"I don't see how."

"My dear, of course it is. You can trust me. You've just said you can."

"And you can't trust me, you mean?"

"How can one trust any man? Men are polygamous. Every book on sex that's ever been written has said as much. You'd be certain to get into mischief if you weren't looked after."

"So I'm to sit at home while you gad around London with a succession of different men?"

"If that's what you find most amusing."

"I don't see that there's anything else for me to do."

"There's your club."

"My club!"

"Or you can go to watch boxing, or billiards, or you can go to a theatre or a cinema. You're perfectly free."

"Is that your idea of freedom?"

"Well, what more do you want? You can do anything you like."

"Except the things I want to."

"I don't know what you mean by that. I'm not going to have you going out with other women, if that's what you mean. And, anyhow, why do you want to go out with them? Aren't I enough for you?"

He looked at her helplessly. It was an issue that he had contested once, and that he had not the courage to thrash out again. He shuddered as he remembered the miserable week, so many years back now, that had followed her discovery of the completely innocent evening he had spent with Gladys Stokesbury. He had argued, he had pleaded, he had cajoled. "Be reasonable," he had said. "You're always going out with some man or other. Night after night you leave me here at home to amuse myself. Why shouldn't I go out with Gladys Stokesbury now and again? I'm not in the least in love with her. I'm not even attracted to her. She's just a companion, that, and no more than that. Why shouldn't I go out with her?"

But Faith had refused to discuss the question. She had retreated behind a barrier of obstinate reserve.

"It is no use arguing," she had said. "I am not going to have my husband going about with other women."

"And I," he retorted, "am going to do exactly as I choose."

"In which case," she had announced, "I shall cease to regard you as my husband."

And for a whole week she had observed towards him an attitude of frigid and unapproachable politeness that had reduced him to a state of nervous irritability in which it was impossible to sleep or work or play. That cold hostility had pursued him everywhere. In the end he had capitulated unconditionally.

"I'll promise anything you like!" he had cried, "if only you'll come out from behind that barrier."

The moment he had given that promise she had become again the sweet, affectionate companion with whom he had fallen and still was in love. As long as she had her way she was charming and agreeable. The moment that she was thwarted she became hard and hostile and impossible. There was only one way of maintaining peace, of leading any sort of life, and that was to let her do exactly as she chose. It was no use trying to reason with her. She was not interested in reason. She was concerned only with her own will and the getting of it. She knew, too, the way to get it. She had only to retreat behind that barrier to make his own capitulation inevitable. She held all the cards. As everywhere women were holding all the cards to-day.

With a sigh John Terance looked up at the portrait

of his great grandfather that hung above the mantelpiece. A genial four-bottle fellow he had been. You could tell that from the flushed face, the thickened nostrils, the friendly wrinkles about the eyes and mouth. A genial autocrat who had ruled his family of thirteen children as a colonel rules a regiment. He had not bothered about getting home in time for dinner. He had stayed in the card-room of the Granville as long as his money lasted, and his legs supported him. He had told his wife that the nursery, the drawing-room and the kitchen were her province. He had given supper parties for the ladies of the chorus, and had excused himself with the reflection that with men these things were different, and that, anyhow, men were polygamous. As though, John Terance reflected, to keep track of one woman's fancies was not job enough for any man. In the whole course of her married life his great grandmother had not received a single letter that had not been read by her husband first. A genial autocrat.

And there was the telephone ringing, and Faith was lifting the receiver, and, "Oh, yes, Bobby darling," she was saying, "and you're calling for me here? that'll be splendid. And, angel, whatever you do, don't forget . . ."

Terance shrugged his shoulders. There was nothing to be said. One could not argue with her. One had to let her be. But it was reprovingly that he looked up at his great grandfather's portrait.

"If only you had been less of an autocrat," he thought, "life would have been a great deal easier for me."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE GOLF MATCH

"CAN he? I wonder! He should be able to. I don't know."

Mr. Bulliwell's breath came fast and labouredly. It was hot: damnably. The sweat was running down his face; his collar was soiled and sodden. His vest had rucked above the equatorial expanses of his stomach. His shirt was scratching him between his legs. His feet were swollen inside his pointed shoes. He had galleried sixteen holes and felt as though he had walked sixteen miles. His anxiety was greater, however, than his discomfort. He was too busy praying that Gavin Todd would win his match against the American who had challenged him to a return match on any day on any course, to realise how miserable he was himself.

It had been an exacting match. To begin with Todd had gone right ahead. At the turn he had been five up. But from then on the American had pulled the game right round. He had won the tenth hole, halved the eleventh and twelfth, won the thirteenth, halved the fourteenth, and won the fifteenth and

sixteenth holes with ease. He was on top. Had it been then a thirty-six hole match there was no doubt who would have won: the betting would have been twenty to one on the American. Even as it was the betting was against Todd. If Merivale finished level on the eighteenth green the chances were overwhelmingly in favour of his taking the lead and match during the extra, deciding holes.

"If Todd loses the next hole, he'll lose the match," thought Bulliwell. "The moment his lead's gone his confidence will follow, too."

And he felt as worried, as nervous, as unhappy as if his own commercial prosperity were at stake.

"If only he can pull it off," he thought, "if only——"

He felt for Todd that fervid of adoration unaccountably reserved for athletes, that Aristotle described as the lowest form of love. Bulliwell identified himself with Todd. From a distance he had always admired him, and now that they had become acquainted he felt as though it was himself, not Todd, that was playing. "If he could only win this hole," he thought, "even if he could halve it, it might be enough; it would give him back his confidence."

Which was what Gavin himself was feeling.

In most games there is a psychological moment to which you look back and say, "that was the deciding

stroke." Such a moment had come at the turn, at the tenth hole. If Todd had won that hole he would have been six up, and Merivale would have abandoned heart. Todd had realised that, and realising it had played over-confidently. He had been so sure of winning that he had tried to do in three a hole he should have been content to do in four. As a result he had gone off the course and had lost the hole.

The loss of that hole had given his opponent the confidence he needed. From that moment Merivale had outplayed him thoroughly. If the American were to win this hole, Gavin knew that although they would start the eighteenth hole square, he himself stood little chance of winning. But he knew equally well as he walked from the sixteenth hole to the tee, that could he halve that hole, could he check the American's chances of success, could he start the eighteenth hole one up, the betting was on his keeping his lead. It was a moment as psychological as the tenth hole had been.

There was a dead silence in the huge gallery as the American prepared to drive. The seventeenth hole was about the most difficult and fascinating in the course. A stream ran out at an angle across the fairway, some two hundred and sixty yards away. The one chance of getting on to the green in two was to clear that stream. It was a shot, however, that only a champion playing at the height of his

form would attempt. Bogey for the hole was five. The safe game was to stay on the near side, clear the stream with the second shot and reach the green in three. From the way the American addressed his ball it was clear, however, that he was going to try and carry the stream. Glances were exchanged meaningly in the gallery. So this was his game, was it, to carry the stream on the wave of his self-confidence and win the hole on his drive?

Gavin waiting at the side fidgeted with his tie nervously. It was a bold move, almost a reckless move: as reckless as his own attempt at the tenth hole to win the match out of hand. Perhaps it would have the same result.

There was a nerve-charged silence as the American addressed the ball, as his club swung back, as its head cracked on the indiarubber; a moment of utter silence as the thousand eyes of the crowd watched the flight of the white swallow; the swift rise against the pale blue of the sky; the slow dip into the dark shadows of the pines; a moment of completest silence; then there was a loud burst of clapping: a burst that was continued; that paused, only to break out louder, as it was seen that the ball had not only cleared the stream but had rolled some thirty yards beyond it. It was a drive of close upon three hundred yards; such a drive as only a big golfer can produce and only rarely. The American watched his shot; then with a smile on his mouth

he walked away from the tee. The smile was eloquent. "Beat that," it said.

In that moment Todd came as near to losing his head as he ever had during his golfing career: he felt as though he were being dared: dared to carry that stream, to press his shot in a desperate attempt to outdrive his opponent. And it would be madness to attempt it. He knew that. He knew he could not outdrive Merivale, and in the attempt to do so he would, as likely as not, drive off the fairway into the stream. It would be madness to attempt the shot. Far better to play short on to the near side of the stream, and by an accurately laid approach shot fluster his opponent into a mistake. It was an advantage to play your second shot before the other man. He knew how often a big drive lost a man a hole.

Squarely, ironically he met with his own smile his opponent's half smile. Moving slightly to the left he teed his ball. Anyone knowing his play would realise that he was going to play short. He knew what kind of whispers would be going on behind him; knew how the refusal to accept the challenge of that big drive would be accepted as an admission of failure. The knowledge that that was being whispered increased the feeling of defiant confidence that the refusal to be dared had brought him. He'd show them.

There was very little applause for Todd's drive.

It was an anti-climax to the American's big hit. But through Todd it sent a thrill of pride. The ball had gone almost exactly where he had meant it to. Two hundred and fifty yards and down the fairway. His next stroke would leave the ball properly placed for an approach shot. With luck he should hole out in four. Certainly he would manage it in five. As he walked down the course for the first time since that wretched shot at the tenth tee, he felt confident, spurred with the will to conquer. He felt no nervousness as he addressed the ball. He was playing within himself.

This time there was a burst of applause as the ball flew straight towards the hole, stopping some thirty yards from the green, on grass so smooth that you could almost have used a putter on it.

Merivale watched the shot anxiously. There was no real reason for him to be anxious. He was virtually a stroke ahead. He should be on the green with his next shot. But his opponent's refusal to be flustered had flustered him. As he addressed the ball ideas that would not ordinarily have occurred to him, fretted him like mosquitoes.

There was a steep bank on the far side of the green. He became suddenly afraid of hitting into it. There was no reason why he should have been afraid. But he found himself remembering that his drive had carried much further than he had thought it would. He had the wind behind him. If his drive

had carried further, might not his approach as well? "I mustn't hit too hard," he thought, as his club swung back.

The thought as his club swung down made him check, made him hold back. The sliced ball curved short and sideways. As he watched it a panic laid hold on the American. He was behind his opponent; he would have to play the third shot first. Unless he got well on the green and near the hole, his chances of winning the hole were slight. He was a hundred yards away. "Whatever happens," he thought, "I must hit hard enough. I mustn't fall short. I mustn't make that mistake again." He wondered which club to use. He took out a mashie: changed it for a cleek, then took his mashie out again. "I mustn't play short," he thought.

He didn't. The ball hit true and straight and hard, flew thirty yards beyond the green to bury itself in the thick grass of the bank beyond. Todd, standing a few yards off, knew that beyond doubting the hole and the match were his.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

FAIR GAME

The news of Todd's victory, shouted by newsboys down the length of Bond Street, reached Prew Catholic's establishment in Brooke Street shortly after three o'clock. A client had come in with a newspaper under his arm.

"Please may I have a look at it?" Jean had said.

She turned quickly to the stop press column. Julia watching her closely saw her face flush with excitement as she read: "Todd won, two and one," noted the eager pitch to her voice as she exclaimed, "He's won, oh, I am so glad!"

Never had she heard that voice so animated before.

She looked at Jean curiously after the client had left the shop. "Do you care as much as all that?" she asked, "about his winning?"

Jean laughed.

"It's silly of me, isn't it?" she said.

It was a light-hearted laugh into which went all the pride and delight of happiness. The laugh hurt Julia. It reminded her. Yes, that was how one could laugh at the start; when love was budding; when

for love's sake all life seemed lovely: when every one you passed in the street seemed happy, friendly, kind; when behind every cloud-strewn sky you knew that a sun was shining. It was not till later when you saw every face that passed you as harassed and inimical; when on the edge of every sun-drenched sky you suspected that clouds were waiting; when you would still say, "yes, it's silly, isn't it," and laugh as you said it, but with bitterness in your laugh. It was later that that came. And a perverse longing to compare the state she knew with the state she had forgotten, made her ask further questions. "Do you like him as much as all that?" she asked.

As Jean answered a fond and brooding look came into her face.

"That's how I must have looked once," thought Julia as she listened.

"It's strange," Jean was saying. "There are people one's known for years; one thinks one knows them inside out; one knows who their people are, what their incomes are; who their friends are; what they think on this subject and on that. And then suddenly you meet somebody you know nothing about at all, who he is, what he is, where he comes from, and yet you feel that you've known him all your life: you can talk to him as though you hadn't a secret in the world from one another. And you know that you haven't known those other people at all. That they've been strangers to you all the

time. You to them, and they to you. It's funny, isn't it?"

She spoke with her head averted as though she were speaking to herself.

"And what's going to happen about it?" Julia asked.

Jean shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know," she said. "I haven't thought. I haven't looked ahead."

Which one didn't, Julia thought. One couldn't. There was a timeless, an eternal quality to love. You could not think of love in terms of time; in terms of the things that belonged to time: prudence, careers, a well-planned future. You ran blindfolded into love, and it was worth it probably. You had those moments. And afterwards . . . well, you had had those moments. You could settle the price you had to pay for them. People talked about the world being lost for love. But there was no need to be so dramatic nowadays. You didn't lose the world, you just put it in a cloakroom and if you left it there too long you had to pay extra on the ticket when you went to claim it. But it stayed there safely enough. One didn't take inevitable steps: the most you did was to mislay your ticket.

"It's curious," Jean said, "what a difference there is between the way one plans one's life, and the way one lives it. I never meant anything like this to happen. And now that it is happening this way, I

just don't care. I don't feel it matters. Do you think it does?"

Julia shook her head; realising as she did how differently she would have felt, how differently she would have spoken had it been Melanie and not Jean who had put that question to her. If Melanie had talked to her like that she would have pictured to herself all that might have arisen from such a friendship, from such a line of action. One was always a coward where one's family, where the people one cared for were concerned. When people argued on the line of "How would you like that to happen to your own sister or your own daughter or your own son?" they weren't following a fair line of argument. You tried to protect the people that you loved. You never wanted them to run risks you would be prepared to run yourself. When people asked you, "What would you do if you were in my position?" you never answered honestly. You told them not what you would do, but what you wanted them to do. Perhaps she was being foolish in attempting to watch Melanie, to guard her against experiences she had not shirked herself: that she did not regret: that had become a part of her: that she had learnt a lesson from. Only . . .

What was it? That you did not want the people you loved to learn that lesson? Or rather you did not want them to learn it in quite that way? You wanted your learning of it to suffice for both. What

was the use of experience if you could not spare others pain through it. Was there any need for Melanie to have to learn that lesson for herself. However disenchanted you might be about life yourself, however you might believe it to be a matter of bargaining, of compensation of one thing being cancelled by another, of one thing being precluded by another; however convinced you might be of the impossibility of anything being had both ways, you continued to believe that to every rule there must be an exception; that it need not always be like that; that to just one person it might be vouchsafed to have the cake and eat it. Was it just silliness to pray that for Melanie it need not be as it had for her, as in all probability for Jean it was going to be? Was it illogical of her, knowing as she did that she would not be pitying Jean, but envying her that evening; that while she herself was changing at the flat for her dinner with Leon Carstairs she would be picturing Jean as she stood before her rows of dresses in her wardrobe, wondering excitedly what she should wear for the dinner with which Todd was to celebrate his victory: wondering which dress he would prefer her in; aglow with happiness, pride, anticipation: just as she herself had done: as she wondered if she ever would again?

With her mind cast three years back, Julia dressed that evening. But for Jean there was no cautioning, no counselling voice out of the past. No whisper,

"Why be excited, why fuss yourself? Once before it was like this."

It never had been. There had been men in her life: men she had liked: men she had been fond of, men she had been thrilled by: but never before had she had this feeling of going out to meet her fate, never before as she looked at her reflection in the glass had she had the sensation of taking a farewell of the person that stared back at her.

"I shall never see you again," she thought. "This evening when I return it will be a different person that will be smiling back at me." Never before as she turned round the room before she left it, for a last look to see if she had forgotten anything, had she had the feeling that she was leaving behind her something that she would never have again; that when she returned, the bed, the chairs, the photographs, the absurd china ornaments along the mantelpiece, the cats, the dogs, the rabbits, would look on her as a stranger.

Which was ridiculous, she told herself. Nothing had happened. Nothing was going to happen. She had no reason for thinking Gavin Todd was in love with her. She did not even know that she was in love with him. All the way to St. James she kept telling herself how ridiculous it was. But in spite of her arguments her heart was beating and her mouth was dry, and the trees in Hyde Park were greener than she had ever seen them; the banks of

flowers were more richly coloured, and there was happiness in the faces of the soldiers who loitered by Rotten Row; and the great cars were purring softly up Constitution Hill, and an amber sunset gilded the chimney-stack on St. George's Hospital. Never had the world seemed lovelier; nor the people in it happier, kinder, gentler.

She was nervous, though, as she climbed the stairs to Gavin's flat, as she stood before the mirror in his bedroom, patting down the coiled hair around her ears; as she looked at the cloaks laid out along the bed, appraising their quality, guessing at the people who had worn them; as she followed the butler down the passage to the drawing-room.

The moment she was in the room, however, the nervousness was banished. She could not feel nervous with a man like Gavin. He had such complete confidence in her that she had confidence in herself. She had wondered what she should say to him, how she should congratulate him, but there had been no need for her to worry. The moment she was with him she had again that feeling of having known him all her life, so that it was the easiest thing in the world to say, "I am so glad you won. I'd so hoped you would."

Nor did it sound conventional as she said it. Nor did it sound conventional when he answered:

"I had to win. I wanted to throw this party." Before she had been in the room thirty seconds she

knew that she was going to enjoy herself. There was no *mauvais quart d'heure*. Talk went easily, in an atmosphere of victory: of congratulation. She was introduced to a youngish man whose name she did not catch, but to whom she found herself talking without embarrassment. How could she feel embarrassed when every few minutes Gavin was turning towards her, smiling at her, encouraging her?

It was the same afterwards at dinner. Gavin had not placed her next to him. For a moment the omission piqued her. The next it pleased her. His not placing her next to him was a singling of her out. She met his smile happily and turned to talk to the man beside her, confident and light-hearted. There were eight of them, the right number for a round table. At times conversation could be general, at times it could be split up into duologues. The stage management was good. The food was good. The wine was good. There were no gaps between the courses. You were not conscious of the butler's presence. It was the kind of party that you could scarcely have helped enjoy. Though even as she enjoyed it, Jean could not help wishing with one part of herself that it were less well done, that the feminine side of Gavin's nature which had made him diffident in their first meetings should make him capable of performing a woman's function. The very efficiency of this dinner was a proof of how little a woman could do for Gavin, or how little he needed a wife: or

rather of how little he felt the need for a wife. For he did need one: his very two-handedness, his apparent self-containedness was a proof of that. He had been led by it into a self-centred, self-sufficiency that would deepen as time advanced; that would throw up a barrier between the world and him.

"I could do a lot for him," she thought, looking at him with a protective fondness.

For Jean it was a happy hour. The sensation of nervousness returned to her, however, when she was sitting with the other women in the drawing-room. Two of them were married women. And in the presence of married women she never felt completely at her ease. Between them and her was the barrier of experience; a barrier of which one was the more conscious in that its existence was ignored. It would have been easier, Jean felt, in the old days when the innocence of the unmarried was assumed; when a latch was placed upon the tongue: when there were certain things that could not be said before young persons. To-day there was not such reticence.

The conversation had turned to a police court case that was receiving at the moment a great deal of publicity: the case of a woman who for thirteen years had masqueraded as a man, marrying and apparently keeping a wife happy. They were discussing the case intimately; in the way that only experienced people could discuss it. The tone of the

conversation assumed experience on the part of each of the four women. Thirty years ago innocence was assumed in every unmarried person; now it was assumed in no one over seventeen.

The conversation set Jean Ryland at a disadvantage. She disliked having to pretend to an experience she lacked. She was resentful, in the presence of these women who were more truly women than she was herself. She felt like a schoolgirl and despised herself for feeling one. It was not her fault, she thought angrily, that none of the men who had proposed to her had been able to persuade her that she wanted to spend the whole of her life with them; or that none of the men who had attracted her had attracted her enough. Or was it her fault? Was it that she was not attractive enough to attract the men by whom she could have been thrilled, transported into ecstasy? Was it her fault? She felt despondent, unsure of herself, wretched; she longed for the men to come in from the dining-room. She wanted to feel Gavin's smile upon her, to feel its warmth, to be comforted by it, reassured and strengthened: to have her faith in herself restored to her.

Her heart beat quickly with relief when she heard the opening of the dining-room door: the murmur of talk in the hall: the turning of the handle. It was to her all she had hoped that Gavin turned, and in his eyes and on his mouth was that smile that was

half a caress. In a second her wretchedness, her doubting of herself were banished. It was silly of her to think like that. She was attractive enough to Gavin. What else mattered? And she smiled back at him, waiting for him to come across to her, to sit beside her and tell her in words all that had been said behind that smile.

But he did not come, and just as she had been grateful to him at dinner for not placing her next to him, she was grateful to him for not coming across to her. His not coming was a singling out of her. Had she been a casual acquaintance he most certainly would have come.

She watched him fondly as he moved among his other guests, talking now to one, now to another, turning now and again that smile upon her. Once again she was happy and herself: once again she could talk freely and amusingly. All the time she was conscious of his watching her. The room seemed emptied of everything and everybody except themselves. He loves me, she thought. And she longed for eleven o'clock to come: for the others to start talking about wraps and taxis and late hours, so that they would be alone, really alone together.

She felt nervous, though; desperately nervous when they were alone. When the last guest had gone, when Gavin had made her staying easy by saying, "You're not in any one's way, are you? I'll

see you home." She felt nervous as he came over to her, his hands outheld.

"Dear one," he said, "I'm so glad they've gone. I couldn't talk to you with all these others here."

He loves me, she thought, he loves me. But how much, she asked herself. For a moment she wished herself back into those simple days when in the words "I love you" had been implied the other words that she longed to hear: the words "for ever." To know that it was for ever that he loved her. For ever that he wanted her. That was what those words had meant when her mother had first heard them. But now, who could say what those words meant? And she felt nervous and looked away as she listened to the eager words that were being whispered in her ear.

"I love you. The first instant I saw you I fell in love with you."

She longed to turn into his arms to say, "I, too, I, too. At the first instant. And as I never have before. For the first time, my dearest."

She longed to tell him how much she loved him. But she could not. Not till he had given her the right by telling her that in his life she was the first real love. If only he would tell her that. "Dear one, there have been other women. But they haven't mattered. They were just a prelude to you, a waiting for you. I've never wanted any of them as I want you; for ever; in marriage, for the ages."

If only he would say that to her, so that "I, too," she could whisper back to him, "I, too. There've been flirtations. But they haven't mattered. I've known that they were nothing: known that sooner or later I'd be meeting you. I've kept myself for that. I've been no other man's. I'm yours, all yours, my darling." If only he would give her the chance of saying that, of letting her be his as she longed to be; of knowing the ecstasy of complete surrender?

"Darling, oh darling, do let me," she longed to cry, "do let me love you! Let me say to you those things that one never has the chance of saying twice."

But he did no utter the words she longed for.

"You're sweet," his voice was saying, "so beautiful, so brave. There's not anything about you I don't love. Not one hour that I don't find a new thing to love in you."

And his arms were about her shoulders. Her face had been lifted up to his. And it was rapture, unutterable rapture, that first real kiss of her life. Her blood was beating, her nerves throbbing, her heart empty for the words he would not speak. "I'm yours," she thought, "yours utterly. Yours to have: to make what you like of. I can refuse you nothing. But I can only give you what you're prepared to take."

And the words grew wilder: fiercer, incoherent: her body lay limp in his arms, her eyes half closed, her senses reeling. She was hardly conscious of the

sudden ceasing of those words and kisses, had scarcely the strength to wonder at that pause.

Had she done so she would scarcely have understood it: could not have guessed how pathetically childish was that white face lifted in the half-light, so unresistingly to his; could not have known how, by a ridiculous association of ideas that white face with the lipstick smudged across it, reminded Gavin of a small child, her face smeared with jam, nor how that memory brought a sudden feeling of compunction, of responsibility; nor how that feeling had been banished by later experience, by the thought, "What's this to any of her crowd. What can I be but one of several?"

That Jean could not have guessed, had she even noticed that second's pause in that flood of words, that rain of kisses. A second more and that fierce flood was again about her. The power, the will to resist was gone. "He'll never know," she thought. "I'll never tell him. I'd die sooner than that, far sooner." With a fraction of her mind she thought it, as she coiled her arm about his neck.

Four hours later they were in the kitchen, talking quietly. Todd's servants slept away. And they had gone in there to make themselves some tea. They were feeling hungry, and had ransacked the larder for eggs and bacon. "I'll make you an omelette," she had said, and while she had stood at the electric stove turning the bubbling yellow paste, Gavin sat

on the table chatting happily. There was between them the informality of a picnic and the sweet intimacy that follows love. He was talking eagerly in the pride of conquest, in the delight of happiness. "We're going to have such fun. We're going to be so happy. We'll have such lovely times. Let's see now," he paused considering. "I'm going to Deauville next month, to play in a championship. Why couldn't you take a holiday and come over? It would be fun. Couldn't you?"

She nodded her head. Yes, she could, and they'd have fun. And it would be lovely. But it would be only a part of herself that would be going there. It was only a part of her that he had taken. It had been only a part of her that he had wanted. So that however much Gavin might try, there would come another who would want all that other part of her that he could have had: that he had not wanted; another who would know how to take that other part. And she would go to him. She would go where she belonged. For she would never belong to Gavin, never as she had wanted to. It was fondly that she looked at him half in pity, half in gratitude, half in tenderness. Yes, she'd go to Deauville with him, and they'd have fun. There and in other places she'd give him for as long as chance let him keep it, as much as he had wanted of her. "But I could have given you so much more," she thought. "I could have made life sweet and fresh and tender for you.

But you wouldn't let me. You didn't want that. So we shall drift apart. Some one else will take what you had no use for, and you'll talk about woman's faithlessness. But it won't be anybody's fault but yours. Because you've never wanted a whole woman, only a small piece of her. And you'll be bitter and you'll be angry, and life will grow just a little narrower for you. You'll grow a little more self-centred, a little more self-contained. Life will contract for you instead of broaden.

"You'll never get the best out of life."

It was not of herself that she was thinking as she turned the omelette. Her eyes were pitying and tender.

"I could have done so much for you," she thought.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MABEL CARSTAIRS' DINNER PARTY

Mabel Carstairs took a last glance at her dinner table, at the polished walnut: the heavy candelabra: the low bowl of tulips: the gleam of light on salt cellar and spoon and knife. Yes. It looked all right. And it should go all right. Her parties usually did. She took trouble over their stage-management. They ran with the smoothness, with the apparent absence of effort that is the proof of effort. There were no awkward pauses. There was no *mauvais quart d'heure*. Knowing the standards of unpunctuality to which her various guests attained, she invited them for different times. Half-past eight if they were punctual. A quarter-past if they were casual. Eight if they were established late arrivals. Her parties invariably went well. She took a pride in seeing that they did. But it was without any excitement that she took that last look at the table. She did not really care whether the party went well or not. She did not really enjoy parties any longer. There was a time when she had loved entertaining. As a young bride she had felt at her happiest as a

hostess, sitting at her own table with her friends about her, happy in the pride of her success in the knowledge that her party was going well; that she was herself gay, and pretty; with her husband's eye turning every now and then with a tender adoring grateful look in them. He had been so proud of her. And through that whole happy evening, the happiest thing had been the knowledge that when it was all over he would be taking her in his arms, to whisper eager, adoring words into her ear; to congratulate her, to tell her how proud he was of her, how grateful he was to her, how desperately happy he was to be married to her. Over an interval of a dozen years she could still hear the tenderness and fire of that whisper.

At the memory she shrugged her shoulders. Well, that was over. Had ended with the birth of her second girl; with the illness that had taken her looks from her. As she turned away from the table, she met her reflection in the oval mirror above the mantelpiece. With a savage, perverse delight she looked at the reflection. Yes; they had gone all right. No one would call her pretty now; not even attractive. And yet she could not tell how her prettiness had gone. Her face had not fattened or lined; her complexion hadn't mottled. Her hair was as thick as ever. Yet it had gone. And no beauty parlour could bring it back. As she looked at her reflection she half wondered whether beauty was really a

thing that you possessed yourself, or whether it was not like the colour of the sea that was blue only when the sun shone on it: so that you were only pretty as long as people thought you pretty. Perhaps she would still be pretty if Leon loved her. Which he didn't, of course, and never would. She knew that. You could not get a man back once you'd lost him.

In an ill-humour she walked into the drawing-room. Leon was standing beside the fireplace. An extremely well-cut coat confirmed the easy supple lines of his body. His blond hair lay back in a sleek wave from his high forehead. His cheeks were glowing after a bath and shave. He had not aged a day since they had married. With the same savage perversity that she had marked each sign of age in her own face, she marked the signs of youth in his. Bitterly she noted them.

It was not fair that he should have remained young when she had aged. If only he were feeble and fat and unattractive, so that other women would not bother about him, so that he would be grateful to the one woman who clave to him. Or if she could have kept young so that he would still have loved her. They might still have been happy; might still have been in love with one another. She would have loved him so much if he had only let her; could still love him for that matter. And it was for the very reason that he wouldn't let her, that she was never

able to suppress a feeling of irritation when she was with him. The first question she put to him set the note of their conversation.

"How many of you are going to this 'Friendship' party?"

"The Richmonds, Julia Terance and myself."

"Where are you changing?"

"Here."

"And taking your things on in suit-cases?"

"I suppose so."

"What some people will put themselves to for the sake of pleasure! You'll feel like rags to-morrow."

"That's our business, isn't it?"

Mabel pouted. "I suppose so. But I can't imagine how girls like Julia Terance can lead lives like that, and then go to work in the morning."

"She's young."

It was said irritably. Mabel's eyes flashed. Which I'm not, he's trying to say, she thought.

"She may be," Mabel retorted, "but she won't stay so spending her whole time in night-clubs and cocktail bars."

"She doesn't spend her time that way."

"Doesn't she? Most of her friends do."

"She doesn't."

"Really? Well I can't say I care anyhow how she spends her time. I've put her next to you at dinner by the bye. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

It was not particularly what he would have liked. It was very certainly the exact opposite of what Julia wanted. She had not wanted to come at all. She wanted to forget that Leon had a wife. She hated the idea of meeting her, of being entertained by her, of accepting the false position that the acceptance of that entertainment forced on her. Least of all did she want to be seated next to Leon. She would be able to find nothing to say to him. Two people who were intimate in an unrecognised intimacy, never could in public. They would be embarrassed by one another. They would be unable to behave as the casual acquaintances their friends took them for. Gloomily she sat herself on his left-hand side. She knew what it would be. She would sit silent the whole evening. She would grow self-conscious. She would feel that people were looking at her, were thinking things of her. "I must make an effort," she thought. "I must try." Resolutely she turned to take her part in the conversation.

They were discussing the engagement of a mutual friend. "I can't imagine how it can turn out well," some one was saying. "She's not in the least in love with him."

"But she isn't marrying him for love," Leon answered. "She marrying for position, for mutual tastes, for an agreeable way of life."

"Then what's going to happen when she falls in love. She'll feel she's been cheated."

"Oh, no she won't. She'll have the things she married for. The woman who feels that she's been cheated is the woman who marries for love, and finds that what she took for love wasn't love at all. Marriage hasn't given *her* what she thought it had. She feels cheated."

"That sounds like a plea for the *mariage de convenance.*"

"There's a lot to be said for it. You're sure of what you're getting then, don't you agree," he added to Julia.

"In a way."

She had an impulse to develop the theme to its logical conclusion, to deny the worth of love, to extol the material side of life, to exasperate Leon by the implied disparagement of the feelings she had for him. She was angry with him for the glibness with which he was expressing views that were not his real views, or rather, that were at variance with the views that he expressed to her; angry, too, with him for forcing her to take part in such a conversation; for expecting her to express her views on love in public, to discuss in his presence the one subject in the world that it was impossible to discuss impersonally. Every honest opinion expressed on love was a chapter in one's autobiography. You could only speak out of your own experience. And there was Leon elaborating his theme.

"After all, you know," he was saying, "the mar-

riage of convenience is in point of fact exactly what the modern girl is making nowadays. Her parents made love marriages in protest against an older generation that tried to arrange their marriages for them. They demanded Romance. They were not, they said, going to lose their one chance of it. And of course to them marriage was that one chance. They were chaperoned. They had no latchkey. They had no cheque-book; their letters were examined. But to-day marriage isn't by any means a girl's one chance of romance. No more than it is a man's. A girl marries in much the same way that a Victorian man did. She thinks it's time she settled down."

With her nerves on edge, Julia listened. Yes, in a way it was true enough. That was how they did marry, more often than not, the girls of her generation. They had their fun; their freak parties; their flirtations, and then they got tired of it; they felt the need of a home and constancy. So they married, calm-blooded, open-eyed. The only difference between this generation and the mid-Victorian was that where the mid-Victorians had their marriage of convenience arranged for them by their parents, it was the young people themselves who arranged their marriages to-day. Yes, it was well enough, thought Julia. But if those were Leon's views on marriage, why was his own life a complete contradiction of them. If marriage was an arrangement of convenience into which you need not enter, why

was he ruining his own marriage because it happened to be loveless?

He spoke so confidently, too, with such an assurance. She hated him to speak like that. She hated the appearance of strength it gave him. Once she had thought him strong, experienced, mature. It was his strength that had attracted her. And he wasn't strong, she knew that now. His assurance, his aggressiveness was just a façade to hide his weakness. He was weak, weak, weak. He was afraid of life, querulous for protection against life. He was so helplessly weak that she had not the heart to hurt him. Just as it had been his strength that had attracted her, so was it his weakness that held her now: against her will: against her judgment: against her wishes. She would never have stood the strain, the indignity of such a relationship if she had not felt that by ending it she would break the faith and purpose of Leon's life. He needed her so, he was so unhappy. He had so many troubles at his office and in his home. She was the one happiness he had in life. She could not take that little from him. She must do the best she could. Resolutely she took her part in the conversation.

Morosely from behind the bowl of tulips Mabel looked down the table. She was not enjoying herself. What was the idea of these parties: why did one give them: why did people come to them? Because you owed somebody a dinner. Because you had an

evening to fill in; because you were caught in the social machinery of giving and accepting invitations. Not because you liked people. Not because you felt the need of seeing them.

In the days when Leon had loved her, she had seen the whole of life in terms of fondness and affection. Now that Leon no longer cared, that he stayed with her only out of duty, out of habit, she saw life in terms of duty and of habit. Would it matter to one of these people if she were to die to-morrow: would it matter to her if she were to see none of them again? Not one: not a single one. That Terance girl. Why should she be here? She was Leon's friend, not hers. They were always together. People kept saying to her, "I saw your husband to-day with such a pretty girl." Were they in love with one another? Was there anything to it? She did not know. One was always the last person to learn that kind of thing oneself. Probably every one in the room knew the facts except herself. It might be true. It was likely that Leon should search elsewhere for what he could not find at home. Men were like that. But since they were, they should keep that side of their life apart from their home life. They shouldn't bring their mistresses into their wives' houses. Things had been better in the days when men had set up shop girls; been humiliated and duped by them; but at least had confined their intrigues to women of another class: had allowed their wives to retain their

dignity. The Victorians had been cleaner about those things. Why should she have to meet this girl?

When they were in the drawing-room afterwards she found it almost impossible to be polite to Julia. Julia was conscious of this hostility: a hostility that was shared, it seemed to her, by the other women. They were justified, she thought. She had no right here: she was accepting hospitality on false pretences. These other women suspected what they did not know. They resented her presence amongst them. They were not actually rude to her. But she found herself left out of conversation. Her remarks were listened to and answered, but the trains of discussion she started were not followed up. No attempts were made to lead her into the conversation. In the end she subsided into silence. By the time the men joined them, she was fretful and impatient. She beckoned Leon across to her. "It's no good," she said. "I'm not coming here again."

A pained, worried look came into his face.

"My dearest, why?"

Julia shrugged her shoulders. "You must surely see that. The situation's just not possible."

"You're going to let me down, then?"

"Of course I'm not."

"It will amount to that."

"Why?"

"Unless you come here I won't be able to see you away from here."

"What nonsense, Leon."

"It isn't nonsense. You can't be treated like some girl in an East End hat shop that is taken to places where she won't be seen. A girl in your position has to be friends with the wives of her men friends. It's not fair to her otherwise."

"Does it matter?"

"Of course it matters. I tell Mabel that you're one of my best friends. The natural answer is, 'Oh, well, then let's have her to our parties.' If you don't come she's suspicious."

Wearily Julia listened. Yes, she knew these arguments: she had heard them so many times; during the months since she had let herself drift into this intolerable situation. How essential it was to maintain appearances. How to the world and Mabel it must be made to appear that they were no more than friends.

"Don't make things harder for me than you need," he said. "Things are so difficult for me here and at the office. You can't think what the strain of it is. I don't know sometimes how I can stand it."

Julia made no reply. He would get round her in the end, of course, as he always had, as he always would. His weakness was his strength. One hadn't the heart to hurt him. But she was weary, so completely weary of everything the situation involved: the deceit: the strain: the obligations. Anything would have been better than that: anything. To be

the plaything of a cad: to be bullied, deceived, exploited: anything would be better than the endless series of complications that a weak man involved you in. You became a part of his insufficiencies.

"It's only a question of time," he was insisting. "It can't be more than that: when I'm a partner, when the future is safe, I'll be able to arrange for a divorce, and we'll get married."

The old familiar words. How often she had listened to them. And with what changes of attitude. In the beginning she had listened with a fond, indulgent smile. She had not taken seriously that easy talk of marriage. She had not wanted to marry anyone. She had been young. Life was new and Leon had attracted her.

The setting had been romantic: Villefranche in August. The little fishing village cut back in the cliff's solid rock, with its narrow climbing streets, its *rue obscure,* its archways; its green, flower-hung balconies, with pretty Italian children tumbling in the gutter: and pretty Italian women sitting on their doorsteps, sewing: and sunburnt fishermen with brown muscled arms, in sleeveless tricots: and the market, the fruit and flower stalls, and the boats anchored in the harbour.

Across the bay was the headland of Cap Ferrat: and all day the sun had shone out of a blue sky. You had woken at six o'clock with the sea a quivering carpet. You had bathed in the cool grey water.

You had breakfasted on the hotel terrace off coffee, figs and crisp French rolls. And after breakfast you had rowed over to the yellow sands of Lutetia. You had swum and sun-bathed there, lying on your face with the sun beating through your back. And in the afternoon you had strolled into the hills among the grey-green, olive planted terraces; returning hot, and dusty, for your evening bathe. You had felt lazy, happy and at ease. Every one was happy. Nobody had a care. The children smiled at you in the streets, and there were smiles on the faces of the market women with whom you bargained every morning for an extra fig. As you watched the blue train curving along the hill on its way to Cannes, you could not believe that civilisation was an hour distant. And after dinner when on moonless nights you rowed out into the bay the phosphorus was incredible. You swam under water and your body was clothed in fire like a Blake drawing. On moonlit nights you sat on your balcony watching the great copper shield lift slowly over the headland and Cap Ferrat. You forgot London: you forgot the future: you forgot the responsibilities that were waiting you. You lived in a spaceless, timeless universe.

It had been a dream, and Leon away from his family, on a holiday, had been so fresh, so youthful, so charming a companion. They had walked, laughed, swum and danced together. A balcony had

run the length of the hotel. His room had been next to hers. At night they had sat side by side looking out over the slate grey water at the pale still blue sky, at the soft silvered hills, their hearts open, defenceless in the face of beauty. It was the kind of romance one's girlhood dreamed of. It had been easy to believe then in the "forever" quality of love. It had been lovely to hear Leon speak of marriage to her. Lovely to feel that she mattered to him so much that for her sake he would be ready to break up his marriage and the fabric of his life. She had not wanted him to. But it was lovely that he should want to.

And later when they were back in London it was the excitement of a new relationship and the thrill of secrecy that had led her to combat the difficulties of meetings, that had made her decide to work in Brooke Street, and on the proceeds of that work to furnish the flat in Paddington. She had not looked ahead. She had not visualised the complications that would arise: nor had she realised how Leon himself would change; that his gaiety and laughter had been a reaction, a relief from the cares of a wife and the office; and that the eager, romantic Leon would become the petulant exacting suppliant who appealed not to her youth but to her pity. She knew now, and it was because she knew that she was so desperately anxious to preserve Melanie from a similar experience. If only she could do that, it might be that she

would be able to see as justified all these months of strain.

Two years back she had smiled on Leon's protestations. Now she saw marriage not as a romantic adventure but as the one outlet from an intolerable situation. It was no good being bitter. One just had to wait.

It was difficult, though, that waiting, and it was difficult not to feel bitter as Leon's car drew up a couple of hours later outside the pyjama party on the "Friendship." It was the kind of party that three years ago she would have enjoyed. In an hour of novelties the "Friendship" was the season's novelty. The best freak parties of the summer had been held there. There had been a tropical party at which the women had appeared as Hawaiians in grass skirts and the men as planters in pith helmets and duck suits. There had been a Venetian party, a Regency party and a Robot party. It was the first time that Julia had been to a party there, and as the car drew up under Charing Cross Bridge, and she felt exhilarated and curious as she walked on Leon's arm in her green silk pyjamas, across the Embankment towards the pier, through the knot of inquisitive idlers who had collected at the gangway. On the upper deck chairs and cushions were set about the hatches. Lying back there in the stern, looking up at the sky, violet and star-studded against the black irregular outline of wharves and chimney stacks,

with the sound of the water lapping against the ship, you might have fancied yourself moored many miles away in the bay of a tropic port, had there not been the Embankment on the other side, with its great, double-decked cars swinging between Blackfriars and Kennington, the knot of people grouped on the bridge, looking down upon you; and beyond, like some fantastic moon, the red vast circle of Big Ben.

Below deck there was the bar. Behind stacks of savoury sandwiches, foie gras, anchovy, caviare, smilingly harassed waiters, dressed as stewards, were serving champagne, cocktails, gin fizzes, and cold rum punch. At one end of the long low room, which had been divided once into the innumerable small compartments of cabins, storerooms and messrooms, was a nigger band. Lighthearted in their Lido silk pyjamas, a couple of hundred people were dancing or sitting on the settees along the wall, or standing in knots around the bar, chattering noisily.

Champagne corks were popping with hospitable regularity. A face or two was looking a little flushed. Here and there fingers were intertwining. It was the kind of party that it would be well, no doubt, to leave fairly early. But it was still, and would remain for a couple of hours, jolly and fresh and openhearted. It was the kind of party Julia ought to have enjoyed. There were the kind of people there, too, that Julia liked, that she would have been happy

to meet again and talk to. But she could not help remembering that this was the kind of party that had led her into the mess in which she now found herself.

She knew what the party would have developed into by five o'clock. There would be drunks propped up in corners: drunks being helped to taxis: drunks being encouraged to be sick. Those who were sober enough would be petting openly. A grubby business: a symbol of the life it typified. It looked gay enough to begin with, this world of broken conventions and free love: as gay as this party was looking; but it would end as this party would end—squalidly.

It was this knowledge that stood as a barrier between her and her enjoyment, and it was with a feeling of irritation that across the room, through the haze of the smoke, she saw Melanie dancing with young Savile. With protecting fondness she watched her dance.

Melanie was such a child, a year younger than she herself had been when she met Leon Carstairs, with none of the attitude of modish boredom that so many of her contemporaries affected. Her lips were laughing and her eyes alight. She was enjoying the party right enough, just as she herself would have enjoyed it three years ago. Just as Melanie's partner was enjoying it. Young Savile was dancing with the slow easy indolent sway of youth, and his cheeks

were glowing, his lips were parted in a smile over his white even teeth. He was enjoying himself just as Melanie was. But then he was a babe himself, in the early twenties, with life in front of him. The sort of man that young girls in the movies fell for instantly. As in real life they ought to; youth to youth. But as somehow in real life they didn't. It was the older, sophisticated women that fell for boys like Savile; and it was to men like Mander that girls like Melanie turned. Youth went to experience, it seemed, to be grounded, strengthened, reassured: to have its wings singed ultimately.

And there was the music stopping, and Mander coming up to Melanie, claiming her for a dance. And young Savile was turning round slowly, looking about the room, his eyes lighting upon Julia, a sudden gleam coming into them as he walked across to her.

"Why, there you are," he said. "I knew you were somewhere here, but I couldn't find you, you've been so quiet."

"I'm a quiet person."

"So quiet," he said, "that you've come to disapprove of parties."

There was a twinkle in his eye which she met and answered.

"Is Melanie telling every one?" she asked.

"Scarcely; only a friend or two."

"And is she angry?"

"Heavens, no; she was amused if anything."

"Amused?"

"It seemed to her a bit ridiculous that she couldn't be trusted to look after herself at her age."

At her age. The old argument that she herself would have used three years ago. But now that she knew better . . . Julia shrugged her shoulders. Folk talked about the value of experience. But what was its value? It was of no use to anybody else, since no one else would listen to you; and to yourself it was of no use since the situations in which it would have been of aid were at the back of you. It lighted the road that you had travelled. Not that which lay ahead.

You were faced by new situations for which you were without experience. What was the use of knowing that there was danger for Melanie at her age in this kind of life?

For there was danger; it was idle to deny it. With keen and thoughtful eyes she watched Melanie as she danced, silent, with head averted, listening while Mander, a half smile playing behind his short, dark moustache, whispered wooingly in her ear. The nymph and satyr, with the nymph half snared, maybe. Suave, assured, youthfully middle-aged, dark, with the pale thin face that does not alter appreciably between the ages of twenty-three and fifty, Mander was the prototype of a Menjou part.

He knew the ropes so well. And Julia, as she watched him dancing with her sister, was overwhelmed by her own impotence to forestall imminent disaster.

"Well, and you, what do you think?" she asked of Savile.

He smiled; one of the most charming smiles Julia had ever seen. A smile that was compounded of affection and generosity and a sense of honourable conduct: a smile that assumed the inherent decency of life.

"I think," he said, "that with a girl like Melanie there's no need for anyone to feel afraid."

And to his words went the same quality of simple faith; a faith so touching that Julia felt that it would have been difficult for her to have spoken had she had need to then. If only she herself could feel like that!

"Maybe I'm wrong and they're right," she told herself. "Maybe I'm seeing things awry, just because things have gone awry with me." Perhaps after all things weren't like that, and life wasn't just a preying and being preyed on. If only she could believe it wasn't.

But there, as the proof was the whole of her life behind her, and as a further proof Leon Carstairs coming across the room to her to dance; and in spite of her weariness, her unhappiness, her unrest, back it came to her, that old quivering of the pulse be-

cause he was near her. How, in the face of that, could she argue with young Savile about danger?

For Leon was bending forward and that flicker of a smile was upon his lips, and her heart was thudding in response to his murmur: "Isn't it nearly time we danced?"

"Yes," she wanted to cry out. "Let's dance; let's dance, and let's forget!"

Even so she hesitated. There was Melanie across the room, silent, her head averted, her eyes closed, with Mander hovering above her, whispering, whispering. She could not so lightly rid herself of that responsibility.

"I'm tired," she said, turning almost desperately to young Savile, "I may go back early. Melanie'll want to stay, probably. You'll see that she gets back all right?"

The slow smile flickered back over the clean boyish features.

"You needn't worry," he said. "I'll look after Melanie all right."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

FREEDOM

JULIA had said she would be returning early, but it was in point of fact well after two that Leon Carstairs' car drew up outside her flat in Bayswater. Her earlier mood of lassitude had returned, so that she hesitated when he asked if he might come in with her. It was late. She was tired, and her alarm clock was set for eight o'clock.

"Only for a second," he pleaded. "Just for a night-cap."

"Very well, just for a minute, then."

Wearily she climbed the stairs. Wearily looked round the flat. Three years ago she had been very proud of it. It had been the symbol of her independence. It had looked very fresh and jolly with its new paint and its bright chair covers and curtains. That was three years ago, however, and the paint had cracked and grown discoloured, the curtains had been bleached by sunlight, the chair covers stained by cocktail juice, the edge of the mantelpiece browned by cigarette ends. It wore now a

draggled and dreary air; like the emotions that it had housed, thought Julia.

"There is whisky in the cupboard," she said, as she knelt down to put a match to the gas fire.

"One for you, too?" he asked.

She shook her head, and, flinging herself in an arm-chair, watched Carstairs as he mixed himself a drink. At this late hour, with the dark shadow of growing hair upon his chin, he made a forlorn, pathetic picture in his overbright waves and grey pyjamas.

In silence, through half-closed eyes she lay back watching him.

"Tired?" he asked.

"Naturally."

She answered wearily, and he looked at her quickly and unhappily.

"I know," he said, "I know. But, darling, don't you think I realise that it's just as much a strain for you as it is for me?"

She had it on the tip of her tongue to retort bitterly: as much of a strain for him as it was for her! Yes, that was all very well, but the strain was of his making. It was his life that was in a mess, not hers. It was he, not she, that was not free. She had it on the tip of her tongue to answer bitterly. She bit the words back, however. What purpose would it serve? He was hurt so easily. Better sit still and listen while the flood of self-pity took its course.

She knew so well how it would go. It was such an impossible situation, he would tell her. And his wife was such a fine person. He owed so much to her. He could not bear the idea of hurting her. But he was going to, oh, yes, he was resolved on that. He would induce her to divorce him the moment this business of the partnership went through. But till then, how could he . . .? And for the thousandth time he would explain that he would never be able to arrange to be made a partner in his firm under the shadow of such a scandal as this divorce would be. The senior partner was an old Victorian. He would never believe in the financial integrity of a man whose emotional life was muddled. If he was to suspect Carstairs, he would get rid of him at once.

"It's impossible," Leon would say. "You see, don't you, how utterly impossible it is? Once I'm a partner it'll be all right. And in a very little while now I'm bound to be. But till I am, well . . . suppose I were to get chucked out now, think what a mess we'd be in, the three of us, without any money."

That's how it would go, thought Julia. And then he would come across from the table and kneel down beside her, and take her hand in his and he would tell her how wretched he was, how lonely . . . "the strain of it," he would say, "the strain of it. These few stolen moments, never being together openly. If you knew how I felt, night after night, alone and aching for you; and in the mornings

waking and wondering whether I shall see you at all, all that day. You can't think what the days are like when I don't see you. They are just so many dead hours to be lived through."

And as he spoke of his unhappiness, slowly, little by little, her bitterness and impatience would slip from her. And she would find herself growing soft and tender, and her lips would smile and her eyes be kindly, because, oh, because he was so sad and because she had the power to assuage that sadness, because it was a joy to use that power, to change this broken, pathetic, unhappy man into an eager, an ecstatic, into a triumphant lover.

And he would cease speaking of himself. "If it weren't for you I don't know how I should survive." That would be the bridge that he would throw across between his rapture and his self-pity. "I don't know how I'd exist without you. You're so marvellous." And he would begin to tell her how marvellous she was, and his mouth would be close against her ear, and his fingers would be tightening on her arm, tightening and caressing, waking again that fever in her blood, that hunger to be loved, that thirst for the syllables of adoration. And her eyes would close and her breath would falter, and, "tell me," she would whisper, "tell me!"

That was how it would be. That was how it had been a hundred times. And this is free love, she thought, and this is freedom.

"And this is freedom," she repeated, five hours later, when the alarm clock beside her bed rattled its imperious summons. Her head throbbed and her limbs ached and her eyes were heavy. "And if I'd been born twenty years earlier," she thought, "I'd have slept on till ten o'clock, when a maid would have brought my breakfast and newspapers and letters, and I'd have lazed among them till twelve o'clock, when I'd have had my bath and slowly prepared myself for a fresh and radiant appearance five minutes before lunch. But I wasn't born in the eighteen eighties. I'm an independent modern woman, and the alarm clock's gone, and the slattern who 'does' for me will be here in twenty minutes, and I've got to have my bath before she comes or there won't be enough gas to heat the range. So however I feel I've got to get up at once."

So she got up, though she felt like death; and made her face up so that she should not look like death. And at nine o'clock she was in Brooke Street sorting out frocks and checking invoices: resisting every temptation to snap off Jean Ryland's head. For three hours she worked incessantly, answering telephones, receiving clients, showing dresses; feeling with each minute as it passed, more and more like death.

And then at twelve o'clock when she had reached the stage of feeling that alcohol only could pull her through the day, in walked Melanie, fresh and

laughing and excited; clear-eyed, clear-skinned, with the dew of youth and supreme health on her; to remark at the top of a clear-toned voice, "My word, Julia, you look sunk!"

There existed no adequate repartee. Her fists upon her hips, Julia Terance stared venomously and enviously at her younger sister. "Of course you can look like that," she thought. "I should if I could sleep on till ten and then spend the morning in a beauty parlour."

"Well," she said ungraciously, "and what do you want?"

"Darling, such a lot of things."

And her eyes flashing and her voice a babble of excitement she rattled off a list. Stockings, she wanted: a dozen pairs of them; and three frocks, afternoon frocks with hats to go with them. Two evening frocks and an evening cloak.

"And angel," she finished, "I want them all this afternoon."

"This afternoon!"

"At four o'clock, yes. I'll be calling for them. And we've hardly any time, have we, so let's get busy."

And hurrying through to the dressing-room, she proceeded to ransack the long row of hangers, choosing recklessly, at hazard, as though she scarcely knew what she was buying, maintaining the whole time an unceasing flow of irrelevant chatter. "What's

the matter with her?" thought Julia. "I've never seen her like this before."

Usually her choice of dress was a laborious business. Anything up to two hours over the selection of a single frock; an endless business of adjustments, of tryings on, and viewings from selected angles. But here she was deciding on five frocks, four hats and a cloak, in twenty minutes.

"That's that," she cried. "Never tell me again I don't know my own mind. And, angel, you'll have them ready, won't you, by four o'clock?"

Julia hesitated. To three of the frocks there were alterations necessary. It would mean shelving a great deal of quite urgent work to get them done. She could not believe that Melanie was in such desperate need of them.

"Won't two of them be enough?" she asked.

For answer Melanie came close to her, like a wheedling child, and put her arm round her neck and kissed her.

"Please, darling," she whispered, "to please me, all of them."

"All of them?" Julia echoed.

"Yes, all of them. It's so important."

"But what can you want three afternoon dresses for by four o'clock?"

"I'm going to a cocktail party this afternoon. I shan't know which one I want to wear till I've tried them all on twice."

Julia gazed at her in astonishment.

"If it's as important as all that," she said, "who on earth are you going to it with?"

Melanie was half-way across the shop by now. At first she did not appear to have heard. But in the doorway she turned, to look round with a look of resourceful mischief in her eyes.

"Who am I going with?" she laughed. "Why, who would it be except Druce Mander?"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

JULIA

At half-past twelve Julia went out to lunch. She had an hour for lunch. And at the end of each week she and Jean cut cards to see who should go first and who wait till a later and more civilised hour. Lately Julia had been rather unlucky. Still, if she had won the cut she would not, she reflected, as she hurried up St. James's towards Piccadilly, be in the position now of being able to pay an unexpected call upon Druce Mander. "And I must see him," she thought. "I must find out what he's driving at with Melanie."

Not that it was going to be an easy interview. She knew that well enough. Mander and she were by no means on terms of close acquaintanceship. They called each other, certainly, by their Christian names. But only because they moved in the same crowd, because they had between them the connecting link of Leon Carstairs. Except when they had danced, they had never been alone together. It was not going to be an easy interview. "Perhaps I'm a fool to come," she thought. "Perhaps I'm just imagining

things." But Melanie had frightened her last night and again this morning, and she wasn't, if she could help it, going to let Melanie get into the same mess that she had. It might be that she was only going to make a fool of herself. But there were times when one could not consider the sacrifice of pride.

She had need of courage as she was shown up the stairs towards Mander's room. It was the first time she had seen him in his office, and seeing him there she had a feeling that she was seeing him for the first time. The man she had met at parties and at dances was the façade set up to conceal the real man who sat at a desk, his back to the light, with a telephone beside him, in an undemonstrative room with a deep pile carpet and padded chair, with brown papered walls lined with shelves of sombrely bound books of reference, brightened by framed engravings of New College, Carfax and the High. For the first time she recognised the power, the capacity for controlling and directing power that lay at the back of Mander's worldly hedonism. She felt frightened at her audacity in coming.

Mander realised that. He had been surprised when she had rung him up to ask for an interview. But he had guessed the reason for that request and he had spent too many years in the lists of gallantry and commerce not to have learnt the value of directness.

"I suppose," he said, "you've come to talk to me about your sister."

Julia met him as directly.

"I want to know how much my sister means to you."

Mander answered her as simply.

"Quite a lot," he said.

"How much?"

"I can't say yet."

"How do you mean, you can't say yet?"

"We haven't known each other long enough to tell."

"Are you in love with her?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"That's another of the things that it's too early yet to tell."

"Does that mean that you are going to ask her to marry you?"

For the first time Mander hesitated; and when he at last answered, he spoke slowly, as though he were choosing his words carefully.

"I'm free: I've no objection to marriage," he said. "On the contrary, I think I'd like to marry. I don't see why Melanie and I shouldn't marry if we find that we suit each other."

"And how are you proposing to find that out?"

"By getting to know one another better."

His meaning was very clear. He was going to make love to Melanie first and think about marriage afterwards. And Julia realised how useless it would be to prolong the discussion along those lines. She

knew so well the arguments he would employ: the familiar specious arguments. They were modern people, he would say to her. Modern, emancipated people who had outgrown the Victorian idea that love could only exist within the bounds of marriage. People who might be divine as lovers might be impossible as wives and husbands. Why deny oneself a rapture because it fleeted? Why tie oneself for life to the consequences of an emotion one had outgrown once and might possibly outgrow again? Why run that risk of scandal and divorce? Love should be a house of freedom. Yes, she knew the arguments: had herself endorsed them once; would even now, perhaps, be inclined to endorse them where other people were concerned. When it was a question of one's own sister, though . . .

"Do you realise that you may be ruining her life?" asked Julia.

Mander smiled; ironically but not unfriendlily.

"Lives don't get ruined," he said.

"A girl's may be. A girl isn't like a man. She puts more into these things than a man does. She isn't elastic like a man."

"That's how the Victorians used to talk."

"The Victorians weren't always wrong."

"I never said they were. No generation could be so consistent as to be always wrong. But you can't quote Victorian standards. You can't get a thing both ways."

"How do you mean?"

"Melanie's a Georgian. You can't get the advantage of being a Georgian without accepting the disadvantages of being a Georgian. If you're going to take the Victorian attitude that a woman's a weak, defenceless creature whose province is the nursery, and the kitchen, then you have a right to the chivalry and protection of men. But if you're going to take up the Georgian attitude that a woman is as effective, and efficient as a man; that she is capable of meeting a man on equal terms, then she surrenders the right to chivalry and protection. It's a question of exchange, Julia. Most things are, you know, one thing precludes another."

He smiled as he spoke, and his voice was kind.

He was nice, thought Julia. He was a hard man, but he was not a mucker. He'd play straight with one. And it was true what he had said about getting things both ways, about one thing being preceded by another. In a way he was. And it was inevitable that he should see life in terms of bargain. His whole life had been spent in terms of exchange. But for Melanie, surely it needn't be. Why should she have to see life that way? Some one had to pick up all four aces sometimes. Anyhow she had not come here to agree with Mander.

"That may be so," she said, "but I'm not going to sit by and see Melanie learn life that way."

"Then what are you proposing to do about it?"

"There are a good many things that I might do."

"Are there?" There was an ironical smile upon his lips: the kind of a smile that quivered there in the course of a business deal when he held every card, and was just waiting for the lead to come his way to play them.

"I don't think there are, you know. You can present Melanie with the kind of Victorian argument your parents produced for you. But I don't expect that they have much effect. And you can tell her if you like that I'm a person of immoral life. But you couldn't produce any facts. I've been singularly discreet, and even if you could they'd only interest her. In fact, my dear Julia, the only real argument you can produce is the very one you daren't."

It was said so quietly that for the moment Julia did not realise its import. When she did the blood went quickly to her cheeks.

"What are you trying to say?" she gasped.

"That people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones."

There was a pause of silence. In that pause Julia realised with what a sense of impotence must the men who had done hostile business with him have looked at that dark calm face. In the quiet way that a man who holds every trick leads card after winning card, Druce Mander went on speaking.

"You could go to your parents, of course, and tell them the exact story of your life: you could say, this

is what happened to me, unless you take care of her, this is what will happen to Melanie. Probably if you did they would take away Melanie's freedom: probably Melanie would even agree that they had been justified. But I don't know that I should recommend you to do that. You would cause your parents great unhappiness. They would lose their faith in you. Melanie would lose her faith in you. Your freedom would be curtailed. You would be a suspected person. You would have to end an intimacy you value. It is not unlikely that the news of that intimacy would reach certain interested persons. If it did there would be no chance of that partnership upon which your own future as well depends."

He spoke so quietly, so suavely that she could not exactly know what he implied: was he trying to blackmail her into silence with the threat of disclosure?

"Are you trying . . .?" she began.

He would not let her finish.

"To point out," he interrupted, "what would be the result of your bringing forward that particular argument. Not more than that. I shouldn't do it if I were you. There's more to be lost than gained by it."

From her point of view, yes. And from her parents'. She did not need telling how unhappy that disclosure would make her people. Nor what would be the result of that news reaching Leon's employer.

There would be an end of Leon's partnership, and the end along with it of her hope of marrying him. There would be just a mess. The three of them and no money; and when that sort of mess came it was the third party that was sacrificed, invariably. She knew exactly how it would go.

"Dear one," she could hear Leon's weak, pleading voice. "You see how it is, don't you? I can't possibly leave my wife unless I leave money behind me with her." If Leon were to lose that partnership every chance of her marrying him was gone. And even if she were to fulfil her threat, to tell Melanie all she knew of Mander, would it amount to so very much, at that? Would any of her arguments be convincing without the final conclusive argument of her own experience, unless she could say, "Look, then, what it's done for me!" Without that, what would her arguments amount to? And she couldn't use that, she couldn't. The shame to herself. The pain that she would cause her parents. No, no, that was outside the question. "It's a mess," she told herself, "a ghastly mess."

As so many had done and would do, she walked out of Mander's office feeling that all capacity for fight had been taken from her.

She returned to Brooke Street to find a pensive expression on Jean Ryland's face.

"I suppose," said Jean, "you couldn't manage to

come away with me to Deauville in a fortnight's time?"

"Is it likely?"

"You could take your holiday then."

"Both of us at the same time?"

"No, I suppose we couldn't. You see," Jean went on after a pause, "I want an alibi."

Julia raised her eyebrows.

"Gavin Todd's playing in a championship there," she explained. "It would be easier if I could tell my people I was going with some one."

"I thought your people let you do what you liked?"

"Oh, yes, they do, of course; but they ask questions, naturally. They're interested in what one's doing. They are bound to say, 'Why Deauville?' I must find some friends of mine that are going there. And of course I can't tell them I'm staying at the Normandie. They know I couldn't afford that. I'll have to take a room in some cheap pension; where I can leave a suit-case and have my letters sent. I'll have to have that in case I run into anyone. Which I'm pretty sure to do, I suppose. It'll be rather fun leading a double life like people do in detective stories."

She paused: there was a bright eager look upon her face.

"Of course, in a way," she went on, "one feels rather rotten about one's people—one hates deceiv-

ing people who have trusted one. But one can't help that. It's much kinder to keep people in the dark. One's really entitled to do anything provided one doesn't hurt people. And it is exciting."

Julia nodded her head. Exciting. That's what she had thought three years ago; and that was how she had shrugged away as a necessity the campaign of deceit she had embarked on. Step by step Jean was following in her footsteps. It would be Melanie's turn next.

And the afternoon passed on, slow and harassing; with telephone bells ringing, and customers worrying her with complaints and questions. Noise, noise, noise; never a moment's peace.

"And they call this being an independent woman," she moaned bitterly to Jean Ryland in the one quiet moment of the afternoon. "And this is the freedom that all those Victorian women talked so much about and fought so hard for. I don't know what we've got out of it. No more fun as far as I can see. We've got to get up so early and work so hard, that by the time the evening comes we're too sunk to enjoy ourselves. Freedom. It is the thing we're all talking of, the thing we're all fighting for. We think it's this and we think it's that, and then when we've got our way we find that it isn't this and it isn't that. I'm beginning to wonder whether there's such a thing."

She remembered once hearing her mother say that

all that modern freedom and modern science had done for the woman of forty was to make her fair game for any man who chose to take advantage of her. But was not that, she thought, what modern methods, modern ideas, modern education had done for every woman? What else but fair game were any of them? She, Jean Ryland, and now Melanie. Druce Mander had been right. What man was going to bother to be chivalrous to women who claimed the right to meet men on equal terms? What chance did any of them stand now the standard of chivalry by which previously their sex had been protected was removed? At the moment Jean Ryland was happy; glad-hearted in a dawning tenderness. But already she had embarked on a campaign of treachery. Already there was in her eyes the first signs of that fretful, harassed look that would deepen soon into the restless defiant impatience of which she was herself the victim. That was the way things went. First of all one was like Melanie: gay, confident, with the world at her feet: then one was like Jean, proud and happy in the delight of loving: then that confidence and delight sank into the despondency that she knew. The wheel came full cycle—Melanie, Jean and herself were stages in an inevitable process. As Jean Ryland was last week so was Melanie to-day, as she, Jean, was to-day, Melanie would become to-morrow, and later for both Melanie and Jean, waited the disenchantment that she knew herself.

Dismally the afternoon passed on: with its telephone calls; its fittings; its letters.

And then at four o'clock there was a messenger boy arriving for Melanie's frocks.

"You'd better get a taxi," Julia told him. "There are six boxes."

"I've got a taxi waiting. In a terrible hurry the young lady seemed to be."

"You've got the address?"

"Carlton Hotel."

"Carlton Hotel?" Julia echoed.

"That's it. I was told to hurry."

Julia asked no further questions. Such little peace of mind as she possessed was rapidly deserting her. This terrible hurry for five frocks that were to be sent to the Carlton and not to her home. What did it mean? Whom did she know that was staying there? And why if she did . . .? Helplessly she lifted her hands against her head. Where was she, what was happening, in what typhoon of folly was her sister floundering? "I'm the only person who can save her," she thought. "I must do something."

And yet there was only one thing that she could do. To go to her parents and tell them the whole story. To say, "thus and thus it was, and this is the kind of mess I'm in, and if you're not careful in a few days Melanie'll be in exactly the same mess. For Heaven's sake keep a firm hold on her unless you want history to repeat itself."

And they would be firm with Melanie, she knew that, if she were to go to them in that spirit. There would be an end of this gadding around to cocktail parties with Druce Mander. An end of that. An end of how much else, too? An end, certainly, of her parents' happiness, of their trust in her, of her own honoured position in the house, an end of her hopes of a marriage with Leon Carstairs, of Leon's hopes of becoming a partner in the firm where he had worked for twenty years. It was a big price to pay for Melanie's safety. And yet, and yet . . .

After all, her parents' happiness, her position in her home, Leon's career and her share of it, were they not all portions of the past, whereas Julia's security was something of the future. Must not the past always be sacrificed to the future?

"There's only one thing for me to do," she said, "and I must do it."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE TRUTH

It was seven o'clock when she reached her parents' house. The pleasant, comfortable house in that tranquil London square, built in the days when life was facile and assured, seemed to stand now in wistful commentary on the speed and agitation of the modern world. "And I'm bringing them an agreeable shock!" thought Julia. "Heaven knows how hard it's going to hit them."

To her surprise, however, tranquillity was the last word that could have been chosen to describe the state of affairs that she was to discover on her arrival. She would not, indeed, have imagined it possible for two middle-aged persons and a staff of three servants to create such an atmosphere of confusion. The maid who opened the door was flustered, with her cheeks flushed and her cap awry. Doors were banging, both in the top stories and in the basement. The telephone was ringing unattended; there was a shouting over the banisters. "Heavens!" thought Julia, "has the place caught fire?" And then in partial explanation there was her father hurrying downstairs.

"Oh, Julia, what a relief. I've been trying to get you everywhere. Where have you been? Oh, your Club, why did I never think of that? Faith, why did we never think of that? Of course Julia would be at her Club. And we've been ringing up all your friends, Gladys and Mrs. Hopkins, and I don't know who we haven't called. And all the time you were at your Club. Now that was stupid of us."

With an affectionate laugh Julia took him by the arm and led him towards the dining-room.

"Now, father dear," she said, "be calm."

"Be calm! How can I be calm?" he cried, in almost hysterical agitation, "with a thing like that happening. You're so hard, you young people. You think we're just the same, that we've no feelings either."

"Now, father dear, what is all this about?"

"All this about? You don't know? You're pretending you don't know, but of course you know. You'd be the first to know."

"But I assure you I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about."

"Not know! She didn't tell you, then? I should have thought you'd have been the first person she would tell. I thought it was a conspiracy between you. And you mean that she's not said anything to you?"

"But who's said nothing to me?"

"Why, Melanie, of course!"

"Melanie! What's that, what's that about Melanie?"

"If only I knew, but she's said so little, it's so like her, that. What was it she said? Oh, I can't remember. Where's the telegram, Faith? Where did you put that telegram? Yes, Melanie's telegram. What other telegram would there be? Did I put it in my pocket? No, there it is on the mantelpiece. Look, here it is, Julia. This is what she says. She says nothing, really."

Nor had she. The whole thing was typical.

"Darling, we have run away. You will forgive me, won't you? We so love each other. Melanie."

With a shrug of her shoulders Julia tossed the telegram upon the table. So that was that, then. And she was too late. The mischief was done. The irreparable had happened. First her; now Melanie. And there was her father, flustering and flustered, talking about the hardness of young people: just as though it was not his fault, his and her mother's. Just as though it was not they that were to blame. Why couldn't they have been firm? Why couldn't they have protected their daughters?

She laughed bitterly.

"Well, what else could you expect?" she cried. "We're only human. And you've let us go where we like, when we like, with whom we like. What's fair for a boy is fair for a girl, you say. The sexes are equal nowadays. So we can have latchkeys and

we have flats, and are free to make the mistakes that boys make. Only boys' mistakes don't matter and ours do."

She was beyond control, beyond reason, blind to the injustice, the monstrous injustice of her assault. The strain of the last hour coming upon the accumulated strain of the last three years had been too much. There was no need for her people to know of Carstairs now. That at least they could be spared. But she was in no mood to spare them anything. They had deserved it. They should have it. Like a Malay that has run amok, she was the slave of one desire; the desire to strike and strike. They should know the full extent of the damage that they had done.

"You think you can trust us, but you can't. How can you be so mad as to imagine that? Have you forgotten what it feels like to be twenty-one? We're only human. We've got to be protected. And there's that telephone. Oh, well, I'll answer it. Yes, this is 8073, who is that?"

To her astonishment she was answered by her sister's voice. Her relief was so great that she could scarcely frame her sentence.

"What, Melanie, you! Oh, my dear, and where are you? That's your secret, you say. But you must tell me. I must know. It's not too late. I'll get a car and come straight away to bring you back here."

But it was by a laugh that she was answered.

"Darling," Melanie cried, "one can't very well leave one's husband on one's wedding night."

And she laughed again, a clear bubbling laugh: a laugh into which went all the glamour and the glow of youth: the joy of giving and the joy of taking: of saying, "You are mine, I'm yours. Let the world slip. We are one another's." That laugh with all it stood for, was the loveliest thing that Julia Terance had ever known. It made the whole business of living a richer thing. "To be able to feel like that," she thought. "Mander's not good enough. It's a pity. Still, if she thinks he is. And she may never know. Or she may make him so. That's the way to love, the way to marry. The one way."

Emotion stifled her; emotion and relief.

"Then you'll give Druce my best wishes," she said weakly.

At that there was another laugh: a merry, ironic laugh.

"And who's Druce?"

"Druce Mander."

"But what's he got to do with it?"

"Well, he's your husband, isn't he?"

At that point Melanie's laughter passed beyond the limits of control.

"Angel, you're so sweet," she spluttered. "And did you really think that I was going to marry Druce Mander?"

"Naturally."

"Oh, but that's too lovely!" and Julia could hear Melanie's voice fainter since it had been turned away, calling into the room behind, "Howard, darling, what do you think?"

At the name Howard, Julia started.

"Howard!" she cried. "Is that Howard Savile?"

"What other Howard could there be?"

"And it's him you've married?"

"Silliest, of course. And you never guessed. How could you though. It happened in such a rush, just as it does in books."

"Then why all this secrecy? What was the need for it?"

"No need, darling, but you can't think how exciting it's made it all!"

Exciting! Wearily Julia leant her head against her hands. Freedom and excitement. Those will-o'-the-wisps. Well, Melanie had been lucky with them. They'd led her safely. She'd never know how much she had been so near to costing others. Wearily she turned back from the telephone to where her parents were standing, fidgeting with excitement and curiosity.

"It's Melanie," she said. "You'd like to speak to her, I expect. It's all right. I was a pig, a fearful pig. I'm sorry."

And then something snapped and she was collapsing into a chair, with her head between her hands, and she had begun to sob, and sob and sob.

She stayed on to dinner with her parents.

It was a quiet evening: the kind of quiet that exists in the centre of the typhoon. There had been storms behind, and there were storms ahead, but here for the moment there was peace. For the most part they talked of Melanie; of where she would live, of whether she would follow Savile to America, of what Savile's prospects were. But though they were talking of Melanie, they were thinking, each of them, of themselves. And of how this change would affect them.

"Something's died to-night," thought Julia. "The corporate family life. It's gone, and it won't come back." And in herself, too, something had died. One didn't pass through such a crisis, one could not make the resolution she had made, and remain the same. For what, after all, had that decision of hers to confess to her parents amounted to but a willingness to sacrifice her future with Leon Carstairs? "Can I live without him?" she had asked herself. And in that going to her parents had been implicit the answer, "yes." She had decided to do without him. "It can never be the same again between us," she thought, "not ever."

For a long while she sat that evening talking with her parents in the drawing-room that had been once her nursery. And when she rose to go it was with a feeling of tenderness for them that she had not felt for years. They would be lonely now, in this house

that for nearly the quarter of a century had been made bright for them by young voices.

"If you're not doing anything particular to-morrow," she said, "I'll come and dine here."

Her father's face flushed with pleasure. "My dear one, do!"

"If it wouldn't be inconvenient," Julia added, "I think I'll stay the night."

She was never sorry nowadays for an excuse to leave her flat.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

DEAUVILLE

THERE is a melancholy quality about the search for happiness. Happiness is the flower of a plant whose roots go deep. It blossoms out of self-fulfilment; out of an interior and hard-won-to peace of spirit. The quest for it is self-defeated. An atmosphere of failure, of foiled endeavour overhangs the surface gaiety of the world's pleasure grounds; the night-clubs, the yachts, the beaches, the casinos, to which people repair in the belief that happiness is localised and for sale; the belief that by going to the Lido, to Cannes, to the Château de Madrid they will find the zest for living that the routine of their normal lives does not provide. In such places, on all except very young and very shallow natures, a feeling of lassitude descends speedily. It is not so much the intrinsic vulgarity of the life that depresses one—the ostentation, the arrogance, the display, the reduction of everything to a dollar level—not that so much as the purposelessness, the restlessness, the feeling of unfulfilment that this deliberate demand for a good time expresses. And Jean Ryland, as she lay sun-

ning herself upon the sand on the last afternoon of her holiday at Deauville, found herself actually looking forward to her return to London, to the long mornings and afternoons in Brooke Street, to early evenings, to unexacting companionship, to the monotony of routine.

It was not that she had not enjoyed herself. She had. To begin with, rapturously. It had been such an adventure. The departure by separate trains, the meeting in Paris. That first dinner with Gavin Todd, the heavenly feeling that at last they were alone and free. Their first real night together. The lovely intimacy that springs from love: the quiet happiness of waking at a lover's side: of opening your eyes drowsily to find his eyes looking into them: to say "hullo" friendlily and to ring for coffee: to dawdle together over baths. They had been a dream, those first few hours.

And it had been exciting arriving at Deauville: booking the small room for herself in the little hotel by the station which would serve as an alibi, to which she would have her letters sent, in which she would leave a couple of small suit-cases, of which she would make use if any emergency required it: then driving on to the Normandie, to the large two-roomed suite with connecting doors; with Gavin coming in and talking to her as she unpacked her trunks, sitting on the bed without shyness as though they had been married months. Then there had been

the first walk along the front with the sun warm and the sea air cool upon their cheeks. And afterwards the visit to the Casino, the passport formalities, the card of membership, the first stroll through those warm thick carpeted rooms: the first hand of baccarat: and later the absurdly late dinner in the Casino café: the crowded restaurant; the music, the tinkled glasses, the thrill of looking pretty and well-dressed in a crowd of pretty and well-dressed women: of hearing in your ears as you danced the whisper, "How ordinary you make all these women seem": to know that soon, in an hour or so, you would be able to move out of this noise and away from all these people, into the happiness of loving and being loved.

They had been a dream, those first few days. And later she had been happy, too. Later when her private happiness with Gavin had been invaded by the people with whom Gavin's golf inevitably brought her into contact, who forced on them the necessity of circumscription, who kept inviting them to large parties which it would have been difficult to refuse, parties which began late and ended late, that it was hard to get away from early. She scarcely saw Gavin alone except for the few hours before dawn in their hotel suite, and then not always. More than one evening when Gavin, on account of golf the next day, had to retire early, had resulted in herself who had no excuse for retiring, being seen home to the small

hotel by the station. It was only when she was seen home by Gavin that she could return to the Normandie.

"It's ridiculous," Gavin had protested. "What does it matter what they think? As it is they probably suspect."

"Yes, but they don't know. And if it were known that I was staying in the same hotel as you, even if they themselves didn't realise what that meant, my people would if they got to hear it. And I'm not risking that."

"Isn't it worth it?"

She shook her head.

"I'm sorry but it's your fault," he had retorted. "They're your friends, not mine."

At times they had come perilously near to quarrels. That was the worst of Deauville. It presented such an easy atmosphere to quarrel in. Your nerves got on edge. You were overtired and overwrought. You drank too much. You didn't sleep enough. The jazz drums worked upon your brain. You grew fractious and irritable. As each day passed Jean felt that she was growing further away from Gavin instead of closer to him. She had hoped that out of this fortnight together would be built up a group of associations that would link them for ever. It seemed to her now that they shared nothing except passion: a strained and restless passion; no longer the deep sweet impetuous need for each other that clamoured

for assuagement. "I'll be glad to be out of this," she thought. It was not that she had been unhappy, but that she felt she should have been far happier. She had felt that something worth while was being wasted. It would be better in London. They would have leisure there. She was glad that this was their last evening; that they had arranged to spend it quietly, dining together, and going back early afterwards.

It was as she was deciding this that her name was shouted by a voice, familiar, but unplaceable for the moment.

"There you are, Jean. We've been looking for you everywhere. We've just come in by the afternoon train from Paris."

She lifted herself upon an elbow and saw looking down at her the burly form of Fred Grant, one of her brother's football friends, and though in no sense a friend of hers, a frequent visitor at her parents' house, accompanied by a variegated male and female retinue. At the sight of it Jean's heart sank.

"It is luck, finding you," Fred was saying. "Your people told us you were staying here. We've been round to your hotel to look you up, and they told us you were going back to-morrow. No end of a disappointment. Still, we've got this evening. We want you to show us all the sights. By the way, you don't know all of us, do you?"

Jean was not conscious of knowing any of them.

She listened perfunctorily to the list of names that was rattled off for her. This was just what she might have expected to happen. Only that morning she had congratulated her luck on not having met at Deauville a single person whom she had known at home, and now on her last day this rabble had arrived.

"You'll be able to dine with us to-night, won't you?" Fred Grant was saying.

"I'm afraid I'm already dining."

"That's too bad. Our one night, too. Is it a party?"

"Oh, no, just two of us."

"Well, if it isn't anyone special, couldn't you join on to us? Is it anyone special?"

There are times when the capacity to lie deserts one: when one is so flustered that the truth is the easiest answer.

"I'm dining with Gavin Todd," said Jean.

"What, the golf man?"

"Yes."

"Really! My, that would be fine. I'd love to meet him. You bring him along now, and we'll have a jolly beano. What's the time now? Just on six; well, suppose you run and change. We'll wait for you, then we can push along and have some cocktails."

Back in her bathing hut Jean dried herself in slow and lugubrious dejection. What on earth had she done, what on earth had she let herself in for? She scarcely knew these people: they were not her sort. In London she would never have considered going

out with Grant. Nor would he have asked her. Why would people think that a slight acquaintance at home was an excuse for genuine friendliness abroad. It would ruin her last night with Gavin. She knew him well enough to know he would be furious. She walked gloomily in the centre of the chatting party to the Casino.

"I expect Gavin Todd will be there already," she said. "I'm meeting him at quarter past."

He was. A look of surprise came into his face when he saw the nature and extent of Jean's cohort.

"Gavin," she said, "here are some friends of mine from London. They've been nice enough to ask us to dine with them."

The look of surprise deepened on Gavin's face, then disappeared. "I shall be delighted," he said, "if they will dine with us. No, no, please," he interrupted as Fred Grant attempted to expostulate. "Waiter," he called. "Book me a table for eight this evening instead of two. And now what cocktails shall we have? I think that on the whole they make Baccardis best."

His manner could not have been more gracious. But Jean knew what he was feeling. He disliked having his plans changed. And he had already changed his plans so that they might be able to dine alone. She knew, too, that he did not approve of Grant. Unsnobbish with his own friends he was extremely particular where those of others were con-

cerned. Business had made him class conscious. He had made it a rule never to accept an invitation except in the way of business from anyone he did not like. She understood the import of that invitation. In unhappy silence she sat sipping at her cocktail. If only they would go, she thought, so that she could be alone with Gavin and explain. But they dawdled on over round after round of cocktails, every one of which after the second, she and Gavin had refused. It was close on eight when Grant rose to his feet.

"Getting late," he said. "Must be going back to change. We're staying at the same hotel as you, Jean. We'll see you there."

Twenty minutes Jean Ryland sat gazing in miserable dejection at the only evening frock she had with her in the hotel. It was a forlorn, dowdy little thing. She would be easily the worst dressed woman, if not in the restaurant, at any rate in their party. It was going to be a wretched evening. If only she had had a chance of explaining things to Gavin. But she had been rushed away before she could say a word to him. And her three attempts to get through to him on the telephone had failed. Her dejection was increased by the hilarity of the others. She looked with disrelish on the bright faces of the men and the women in their smart evening frocks. They were so blatantly out for a good time. And Gavin, when they arrived at the restaurant was infuriatingly suave.

The air of uneasy diffidence which was natural to him and which he carried invariably among his friends, had been replaced by a bright courteous carefree manner, that concealed, she was well aware, the intensest irritation. No one realised this fact, however. Gavin was proving, as usual, a skilful and lavish host. The dinner had been admirably ordered. A Jeroboam of champagne emerged from a steaming bucket. The talk at this end of the table was lively and incessant.

"A first-class fellow," Fred Grant was declaring at her side. "So little swank. So friendly. Jolly good of you to have introduced us. Must manage to see more of him when we get back in town. Must see more of you too, Jean. We don't see nearly enough, you know, of one another." He leant towards her as he spoke. His face was flushed. Across his forehead was a film of moisture. He would be drunkish, probably, before the evening's end. Despairingly she looked across the table towards Gavin; but he was busy recounting an anecdote to the girl beside him. If only the dinner would end; if only they could start dancing, so that she would have a chance of making things right with Gavin.

But even when the dinner was over, it was a long while before she could dance with Gavin. He had his duty as a host to the other women. It was with unutterable relief that at last they edged their way through the crush of tables to the dancing floor. As

she felt his hand against her shoulder, the weight of all her worry seemed to be taken from her.

"Darling," she said. "I am so sorry."

"Why did you do it?"

"Darlingest, I don't know. I was taken off my guard. It happened so suddenly. And you see," she added, finding an excuse for Gavin as for Grant she had been unable to, "I knew that I had to see them sometime. And I thought dinner would be best because then we can get away quickly from them afterwards." Gavin smiled down at her affectionately.

"All right, my sweet," he said. "Don't worry."

The business of getting away quickly afterwards was obviously, however, not going to prove a simple matter. Fred Grant was clearly bent upon making a night of it. And a first-class rugby footballer, when slightly drunk, has a disconcerting capacity for persistence.

"This is your last night and our first," he said. "We are not going to do things by halves."

Before Jean had realised what was happening, she had found herself seated at a corner table in the bar, with an array of large bell-mouthed glasses and a bottle of '71 brandy set in front of her. "We're going to make a real party of this," said Grant.

A full hour had passed before Jean managed through a lull in the talk to say to Gavin, "I want to gamble, please take me to the card room."

The moment they were out of earshot, she turned despairingly towards him.

"Darlingest," she said, "I am so sorry but this is going to be an appalling evening."

"I don't need telling that."

"Darling, don't be cross, it's not my fault."

"They're your friends."

"Yes, I know, but if you knew how I was hating it."

"Let's go then."

"But how can we while they're there? We've got to say good-bye to them. And then one of them would insist on seeing me back to the hotel."

"Oh." It was a point that up till then had not occurred to Gavin.

"You mean that you'll have to stay in the other hotel to-night?" he asked.

"I don't see how I'm to avoid it with them here."

"Do you mean that I'm not going to see you at all, then?"

"Silly one, of course. I'll stay on here after they've gone, and then get back early to the hotel. It's just a question of staying them out."

"That's enough of a question."

Before she could reply Fred Grant was at their side.

"What, not in the card room yet? Was thinking of having a little flutter myself. Come along, children." Before they could remonstrate they had been

led, each of them by an arm, into the card room.

Twenty minutes later the poorer by eighteen hundred francs they returned to the bar, to the corner table, the bell-mouthed glasses and the emptying bottle of Gambetta brandy. And there recommenced the type of conversation that invariably occurs in bars to which women are admitted. When men are alone, drink improves conversation. When women join them, the avoidance of gross impropriety would seem the highest achievement of which the masculine intelligence is capable. Men are too busy restraining what they must not say, to say anything worth hearing. During the next hour the standard of talk descended from level to level of fatuity. Gavin, who disliked drink, became more charming and affable every minute. Jean who was cautiously temperate and had been drinking lime-squash for the past ninety minutes sank deeper and deeper into gloom. She was tired, on edge and overwrought. She was angry with Fred Grant for having arranged this party: with herself for being enmeshed in it: with Gavin for making the worst of a bad job, for the situation that had forced on them the acceptance of it. Free love, indeed. What did free love do for you except involve you in a series of complications? Had they been husband and wife instead of lovers, she and Gavin would have been free to walk away from this party two hours back.

And there was the bottle emptying, the conversa-

tion getting sillier, Fred Grant's face growing redder and Gavin's manner more infuriatingly urbane. "Let's go and dance," he said at length. This time she waited for him to speak first, and when he spoke, all the urbanity had left his voice.

"This is preposterous!" he said. "Surely you can get rid of these people, they're your friends."

The fretfulness of his tone irritated her.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It's the first time that it has been friends of mine."

"What does that mean?"

"It's your friends who've made difficulties for us up till now."

He made no reply. For a turn of the room they danced in silence. With his hand on her shoulder, with her feet following his rhythm, once again the illusion of harmony returned to her. If only she could be alone with him, she thought.

Something of the same feeling had come to him.

"Darling, surely you can manage to get away," he whispered.

She shook her head wearily. "It's too big a risk. It isn't worth running that risk for one night."

"Not even when that night's our last night?"

In her nervous, highly-strung condition she misunderstood him.

"What do you mean, our last night?" she flared. "Do you mean that we're not going to see anything more of each other when we get back?"

"My dear, don't be so silly."

But she did not listen to his explanation. She was angry and upset, in a mood that saw all things out of focus. Again they danced in silence.

"Darling," he said. "Couldn't we slip away for an hour or so. They wouldn't miss you. You could come back afterwards."

His voice was husky with cigarette smoke. To Jean, who could not see the expression of his eyes, it sounded casual. So that's all he wants from me, she thought.

"No, of course I can't," she said.

They did not speak again till the music had stopped. As they walked back from the restaurant to the bar, he stopped abruptly. "Look here," he said, "I'm not standing any more of this. If you can't get away now, I'm going."

"Then you'd better come and say good-bye to them all. I've got to stop." They stood facing each other, too tired, too angry to make the fist step to a reconciliation.

"What train are you catching to-morrow?" he asked.

"An early one. Half-past ten, I think."

"I've got to be on the links at ten. I shan't be able to see you off."

"When will you be back in London?"

"The end of next week. I'll ring you up. What'll I do about your clothes?"

"Forward them to my people's address. I'll say I lost them on the journey."

"There's nothing more then?"

"No, there's nothing more."

They turned and walked on into the bar. "I'm so terribly sorry," Gavin said, "but I must say good-night now. I've got to be on the links to-morrow early. I shall feel like death if I don't get some sleep."

His manner had become in a second, light and charming. He was smiling affably, waving a hand in a graceful gesture of good-bye. A moment more and he had gone. Jean watched his slim figure pass round the corner of the corridor, then turned back to the smoke-laden atmosphere of the bar; its noise, its grubbiness, its silly chatter. Her spirits sank. "I wish I were a man," she thought. "Then I'd get beastly drunk."

CHAPTER TWENTY

AT LAST

THIRTY hours later Jean Ryland walked into Lady Prew Catholic's establishment, feeling that she would need a month's sleep to recover from a fortnight's holiday. Julia Terance was already there. She, too, was looking tired.

"Well, what sort of a time have you had?" she asked.

Jean shrugged her shoulders.

"It had its moments."

"And the grand romance?"

Jean smiled, a little wistfully.

"It was lovely," she said, "bits of it. But all that, you know . . . it's putting too big a strain on love."

Which was what Julia herself was thinking. Had been thinking for weeks, subconsciously: had known incontestably since she had heard Melanie's laugh across the telephone. That was the way to love: to recognise that kinship in one another, that trust, that confidence that could say, "You're mine, I'm yours, we can let the world slip

safely." That was the way to love. Love was too delicate a growth to be subjected to the strain of an intrigue.

It was all very well to talk about the romance and glamour of affairs. In their right setting they were no doubt well enough. In extreme youth, when everything was new, when you climbed by a ladder of lovers of self-knowledge: or when circumstance contrived to isolate a moment; when you met abroad, on some ship or at some hotel for a few days or a few hours, some one you would never meet again. To that there was a glamour. But an intrigue carried on in London by people who were no longer children, in the intervals of their private lives, had all the disadvantages and few of the advantages of marriage. It was not a question of right or wrong, but of the practical ordering of life. People talked of marriages going wrong. And in all conscience the obstacles that marriage raised in the path of love were high enough. To make a successful marriage was a high and rare achievement. But in spite of those difficulties love stood more chance of surviving within marriage than outside it. The obstacles that were raised by an affair were far higher than those that marriage raised. Two years was a long time for an affair to last. The only affairs that did last were those whose circumstances approximated most closely to those of marriage. No marriage, she felt, could ever make her more restive against the servi-

tude it involved than did this long, exhausting intrigue with Leon Carstairs.

That evening when she returned to her flat after dining at her parents' house, to find a letter from Leon Carstairs, she had scarcely the courage to break its seal. "What on earth does he want to write to me for?" she thought. "What new trouble is there?" As she unfolded the sheet of paper, she felt nervous. It was not usual for him to write to her. And the letter had been sent by express delivery.

"Darling," it began. "The most marvellous news. You'll hardly believe it. At first I couldn't. But quite unexpectedly, that partnership's come through. So now, so now . . ."

It was the letter she had waited for so long: the letter she had so often dreamed of reading. But now that it had come, she felt none of the exhilaration she had expected. She did not feel that the door of happiness was opening for her, but that the weight of an intolerable burden had been taken from her. She did not think, "Now I can be alone at last with Leon." She thought, "Now I can give up working at Prew Catholic's. I can give up the flat. There'll be warm carpets and hot water and fires to welcome me at night. There'll be no more early rising. When I feel tired I'll laze in bed and ring for my breakfast when I want it. I'll have the whole day in front of me to spend as I choose, idly, for my own amusement. I'll never again have to meet people I don't

want: never let myself be put in a false position. That's over, all of it, for ever." And she felt tired, intolerably, as one does when the pressure of a long strain is suddenly removed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MABEL CARSTAIRS

At the same time that in the hall of a front flat Julia Terance was reading an expressed letter, in the grill-room of the Ritz Hotel a dinner party of four people was breaking up. It had been a happy, intimate little party. The room had been quiet, with music playing faintly from the lounge. The dinner had been well chosen. The Richebourg admirably mellow. The circumstances had been as they should be at a celebration dinner. And there was a genial smile of successfully proffered hospitality on Mr. Anderson's face as he laid his hand on Leon Carstairs' shoulder.

"I hope, my dear boy," he said, "that this is going to be the forerunner of many other parties, that you and your wife will come and spend a week-end with us shortly. I assure you that for me one of the happiest things about this new association of ours, is the opportunity that it is going to give me to see more of you. I've always wanted to, you know. I've always been fond of you. But I felt that it would be hardly fitting till you were actually a partner with us. There'll be no such difficulties now."

And his hand pressed affectionately on Leon's shoulder.

"He really is a dear old boy," said Leon as he drove back with Mabel. "I think I've misjudged him all along. He's old-fashioned and Victorian, but he's a dear."

"And he's really fond of you."

"That's just what I've never felt before."

"He is though. It's the clearest thing I've seen."

The garage was a hundred yards from Carstairs' house. Mabel stood by him while he backed the car into the lock-up. She looked mouselike in her ermine cloak. As they turned into the road, he took her arm. The sense of success and the well-being that follows a good dinner made him affectionate. He drew her close to him. From her hair rose the scent of mignonette.

"I think you ought to be really happy in the office, now," she said. "I think our good time's just beginning."

For the last four years Leon had slept on a divan in his dressing-room. But to-night on this day of triumph he felt a need to talk. When he had changed into pyjamas he tapped at his wife's door.

"Can I come in and talk to you?" he asked.

She was seated at her dressing-table, brushing her hair. Over a pale blue nightdress she wore a green Chinese coat. A shaded lamp spread a soft light over her yellow dressing-table, on to a three-sided silvered

mirror, on to powder pots and scent bottles and enamel hair brushes; shadowing the corner of the room, and the wide low bed with its blue silk-edged blankets and cream-tinted sheets. Though it was late June, the night was cool, and Mabel had turned the switch of the electric fire. At the doorway Leon paused, enchanted. It was like a lovely picture. The room was eloquent of warmth and elegance and ease. As he came into the room Mabel turned her head and smiled; a fond and friendly smile such as he had not seen upon her lips for many months.

"Leon, dear, have you thought about what we're going to do?" she asked.

"Going to do?"

"Now that you've come into this partnership. It's going to make a good deal of difference, isn't it? We'll be a lot better off, won't we? I was wondering whether you'd still want to sell this house. We always said we would as soon as we could afford to. We never meant to stay here. We didn't really like it to begin with, did we? Do you remember that first time we came here?"

He remembered the day very well. A bleak November morning just after the birth of their first child, with Mabel in the full glow of her recovered beauty.

"We just said we'd stay for a year or two," Mabel said. "And then there was Violet, and somehow I began to like the place. It became a part of me. I

don't think I'd like to leave it now. There's such a lot of our lives bound up here. Don't you think so, Leon?" He nodded his head.

"The best part of our lives, I suppose, really."

She smiled at that. "Perhaps. But think how much good there is to come. I was thinking that we might take a small house in the country, down by the river somewhere. It would be such fun. We could have people down to stay with us. We'd see our friends as we never have a chance of seeing them in London, at leisure, and at ease. We could have such jolly times."

Swinging round on the small stool she began to talk eagerly, happily, her face alight. And before Leon Carstairs' eyes, as he sat on the bed's edge watching her, there rose up a picture of how pleasant a thing life might become for them, now that the future's uncertainty had been removed. There was no country like England for enjoyment if you had just enough money for amusement. People were content with simple things. People would like coming down out of the noise of London to a quiet garden by the river. Mabel was right. He'd see his friends under jollier circumstances than he ever had before. And he'd have a chance of seeing people that he never had before, people he had felt shy of entertaining in London. A place in the country would make all the difference to his life.

"We'd have such fun," Mabel was saying, and she began to make up the first party they would have.

Who should be asked with whom? How would this person get on with that? "Darling, it would be heavenly; couldn't we get one now, straight away for what's left of the summer?"

It was the concrete statement of a date that roused Leon out of his dream. A cottage by the river. Week-end parties, a comfortable and easy life. But that was not what was going to happen to him. It was not for the sake of that that he had striven for this partnership; it was in order that he might marry Julia that he had worked. He was not going to take a cottage in the country. He was going to elope with Julia to some other and smaller house. There would be the squalor and publicity of divorce. Instead of more money there would be less money. Instead of friendship with Anderson there would be disapproval. Anderson would feel he had been cheated. There would be no happiness for him in his work. It was this and not that other picture that awaited him.

The knowledge was a cold wind blowing on him. He felt so warm and happy in this comfortable presence. He did not want to embark on the cold seas of adventure. He wanted to shut away the thought of what lay ahead. He was so happy here. And there was Mabel rising from the stool and coming over and standing in front of him. He had taken one of her hands in his and was playing with her fingers. "Darling," she was saying, "these months have been pretty difficult for you, haven't they?" Her eyes were

soft and tender, as they had been in early days. And he was agreeing with her. Yes, they had been difficult, more of a strain than he could realise now.

"I know it was, my sweet, and I wasn't the help I should have been. But it was a strain on me, too. I've had my worries. It wasn't that I didn't realise. If you knew how proud of you I am." Smiling, she had lifted her arms and folded them about his neck. They were warm and soft: scented faintly with mignonette. They were resolute, they were a protection against all the dangers that the future held. With her lips close against his ear, "It's going to be all right now," she whispered.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE LONG AWAITED

With a quick preoccupied step Julia Terance hurried on the following day to the Soho restaurant where she was lunching with Leon Carstairs. During the morning's work she had made up her mind on what she wanted done. She knew by now how weak and irresolute Leon was. For himself he would decide nothing. From henceforth it must be herself who held the helm. There must be no vacillation now. The point must be got down to straight away.

And so it was at random that she answered Leon's greetings and agreed with him over the choice of lunch. The moment that the waiter had left them she leant forward across the table.

"Leon," she said, "I am so happy about this. I can't tell you just how happy. For both our sakes. And I know what you're going to say now. That divorce is a long business. That it will be a year at least before we're free to marry, but darling, I don't want to worry about that. We've waited so long. I want to begin our new life straight away."

"But how can we? My work's in London."

"I know that. I'd much rather, of course, we could go abroad and stay away till it had all blown over. But since we can't——"

"What are you suggesting, then?"

"The next best thing. That we should take a flat or house and brave it out in London."

"That would mean you being cited as intervener."

"That wouldn't worry me."

"But the publicity!"

"Publicity! That's only what other people think of one, and I'm long past caring about that. No, no, my dear, there's only one thing for us to do. This has all gone on much too long. You do see that, Leon, don't you?"

He hesitated. There was a dubious calculating look upon his face, as though he was searching for the exact words that would express what he had to say; a look that puzzled Julia. What on earth's the matter with him, she thought.

"You do agree with me, Leon, don't you?" she repeated.

But still he hesitated.

"It's not quite as simple as you seem to think," he said. "It's . . ." he paused. "Dearest," he went on. "I've been in this world a good twelve years longer than you have. And I know just what a mess a divorce can be."

It was said so quietly and so affectionately that Julia did not realise at first its implication.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"That divorce is about the wretchedest thing that can come to anyone. It's like a bad apple in a basket. It poisons everything it touches. One can never escape from it. And you're so young; you've the whole of your life in front of you. I don't want you to be involved in anything like that through me."

There was no doubt about his meaning now.

"Are you trying to tell me," Julia asked, "that now you are free to marry me you don't want to?"

"I'm trying to tell you that it would be a ghastly mistake for a person like yourself to be involved in a divorce suit."

She looked him straight in the eyes. His voice had been soft and wooing. But in his eyes she could read one thing only. Terror. Terror lest she should make a scene. That was all he was thinking, all he was caring. And in another minute, if she let him, he would be telling her that love was independent of official ties: that love was the wind that blew: that they would still go on loving one another: that whatever happened they must remain friends: that she must be brave in the future as she had been in the past. Bravery! These married men who messed your life up; who wearied you with tales of how good their wives were and then when they'd kicked you downstairs, said, "My God, the girl's got pluck." In another minute, the relief that she had made no scene would have loosened the full flood of elo-

quence. And she could not stand it. It was just too much. She rose to her feet and reached for the bag that she had hung over the opposite chair.

"What are you doing?" Leon asked.

"I'm going."

"Oh, well. Yes, perhaps it is as well. Look here, I'll ring you up to-morrow."

"You can do anything you like," she answered.

With fast furious steps she walked back to Brooke Street. So that was that, then. He did not want her. He had had her youth, her constancy, her love. For his sake she had left her home, had abandoned the comforts of home for a poky little fourth floor flat: had spent her days working instead of playing: had ruined for his sake, the carefree years that should have been the jolliest in her life. And this was her reward. He had talked about marriage in the days when he had been free to talk about marriage, because there had been no danger of his being taken at his word. But now that he was free to marry her, he made excuses. It was the old story. He had had her and had enough of her. Leon was not going to upset his life for the sake of something he had already had. He might talk about the damage of a divorce suit to a young girl. But who ever thought of anything except themselves. That was all there was to it. He had had what he wanted and he was through. And all he had cared about, after all they had shared together, was her not making a scene in public.

Jean Ryland welcomed her return with extreme astonishment.

"You've not been away half an hour. Not much of a lunch, that."

"I wasn't hungry."

And with an angry concentration Julia set herself to the task of arranging a new stack of models. Slowly the afternoon wore on. The telephone rang every few minutes. Clients came in and were difficult about refittings. Julia's head ached and her eyes ached, and her legs. She was tired, tired, tired. Then just before half-past five, Prew Catholic herself came in flustered and agitated. Some parcel or other had been misdirected. A client had written personally to complain.

"It's really absurd," she said. "It's the kind of mistake that a fourteen-year-old clerk from a board school wouldn't make."

It was the last blow. She had had enough. She was not going to stay in a position where people like Prew Catholic could abuse her. If people were going to be through with her, well then, she could be through with them. She made no reply. She walked through to the mannequin's dressing-room; took down her hat and bag and walked back into the shop, looked for a moment Prew Catholic steadily in the eyes, then turned away.

"I quit," she said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE FOLLOWING SPRING

DROWSILY Julia turned over in her bed. The room was dark, but the luminous clock on her bedside table pointed at half-past ten. As late as that, she thought, as she lifted her hand and pressed the bell push behind her head. Lazily content she lay back, watching the maid turn back the heavily brocaded curtains, letting a stream of faint March sunlight flood with amber light the large high room with its soft brown wallpaper, and black framed etchings, its mirrored wardrobe and deeply cushioned chair; lay there, while the maid turned the switch of the electric fire, and later set at her side the breakfast tray with its coffee, iced grape-fruit, crisp toast and marmalade; remembering as she lay there how nine months earlier she would have felt, waking on such a morning at a quarter to eight to the clatter of the alarm clock, heavy-eyed after five hours' dancing and four hours' sleep, with the knowledge that she had to be at work at half-past nine, and that if she were not to have her bath before the slattern who "did" for her arrived, there would not be enough gas to heat

the range. "I can never have really enjoyed a dance in those days," she thought. "I must have always had the feeling that there was going to be hell next morning." Though even as she said it she knew that it had not really been like that. She had thought, "It's going to be awful, but it's worth it," and the knowledge that next morning it was going to be awful had made these last hours the more worth while.

On her breakfast tray were two letters beside her copy of *The Times*. One was in Prew Catholic's handwriting.

"Julia, dear," the letter ran, "I suppose it is no good asking you, but I am going to open another shop and I do wish you would run it for me. I was terribly sorry about the quarrel last July. It was my fault, all of it. Although I don't suppose you will want to, I just had to ask you before I asked anyone else. We would do it on a partnership basis."

Pensively as she read, Julia tapped the hard edge of the envelope against her teeth. It was a nice letter; it flattered her. And perhaps she was getting a little tired of doing nothing. It had been marvellous at first to be rid of the responsibilities of the flat, the hours of strenuous and exacting work. At first it had been like a holiday long overdue; but one wearied of holidays after a while, one had to be doing something. And if this new shop were to be run on a basis of partnership, there would be a considerable

inducement to throw her lot into it. It might be fun; it might be worth it. Anyhow, she was not going to refuse it at once.

The other letter was from Melanie.

"Dearest," it ran, "I know you will be pleased. I want you to be the first to know I am going to have a baby, and I want you to promise to be its godmother. I think it will be a son."

With a smile Julia dropped the letter to her knees. How unnecessary, after all, that worrying of hers about Melanie had been. How nearly she had ruined her sister's chances for her; how nearly she had ruined her parents' faith in her. It was natural, though, that she should have felt like that, seeing how her own life was going, how the lives of half her friends were going, Jean Ryland's and all the rest. It would have been worth anything to have spared Melanie all that.

She turned after her breakfast to *The Times*. She opened it always at the Court page first. As she did so she gave a start. At the head of the column was Jean Ryland's name; below it the announcement of a marriage to take place shortly, and beside it a name unfamiliar to her, a name that Jean had never spoken; the name of some one, as likely as not, that Jean had only met in the last few weeks.

It would be like Jean, that, to get engaged to marry in a hurry, just as she had fallen in love with Gavin Todd, at first sight almost. What had happened

about Todd, she wondered? She had read in the papers of his visit to America, his victories in New York, of the fight he had put up in the open championship. She knew that all right, but as to what had happened between Jean and Gavin, that she did not know; that she would never know. While it lasted it had been real enough, but whatever it was, it was over now; Jean had got over it, had begun again, just as sooner or later every one began again. Just as she herself would. Nine months back she had thought her life was over. But it wasn't. It would begin again just as Jean's had done.

At that moment, somewhere in the world there was a person waiting to begin it again for her. It was curious that, when you came to think of it, that at that moment somewhere, some one was being brought to you by the invisible forces of effect and cause, was coming to revolutionise your life for you, as you were going to revolutionise his for him. At that moment, not thinking of you or dreaming of you, he was in his office working. In London, perhaps, or Italy or New York or France. On a liner, maybe, being brought to meet you. On a long transcontinental train rattling through the cold miles between Omaha and Ogden. In another hemisphere, perhaps, in another longitude, on the other side of the world; somewhere where it was not day but night. In Penang, perhaps, sitting over gin and bitters on a long balcony, in the close of the swift tropic

twilight. Curious to think that there would come a time when you would say to some one, who had become and was to remain your entire life: "What were you doing, tell me can you remember, at eleven o'clock on Thursday, March twenty-third?" For there was such a one somewhere, on his way to meet her, she knew that.

Broodingly she settled back among the pillows. Her real life had not started yet. She had only known the prelude. Childhood had been a prelude, as school days had been, and the year of travelling and the years in London when she had worked in Brooke Street; the flat, the wretched slattern; Leon Carstairs, even he, all preludes. They had said, the Victorians, that such an experience as she had had ruined you for life, that it maimed you, marked you, twisted you; it didn't, though, not really. No one could ruin your life for you except yourself. You went on with it in spite of, not because of, things. Though she would have given anything she possessed to preserve Melanie from such an experience, she did not really regret Leon Carstairs. He had helped to make her what she was. She would rather it hadn't happened. But since it had, it had become a part of her. You had to accept yourself, as the man had to who married you. He took you for what you were and what you were to become. "I'll make him a good wife," she thought.

DATE DUE

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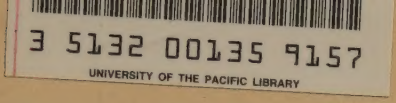
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Waugh, Alec.
"Sir!" she said.

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